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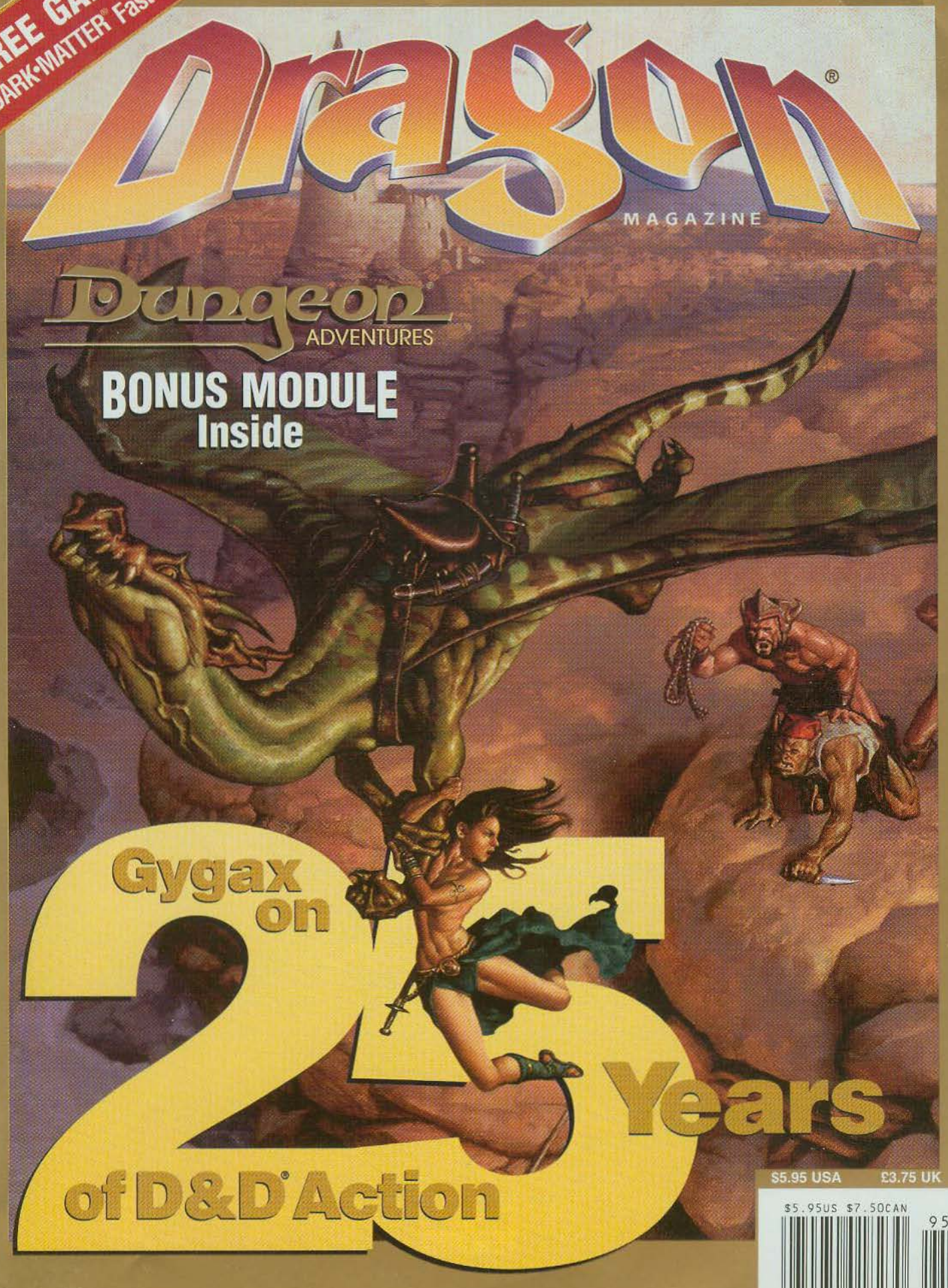

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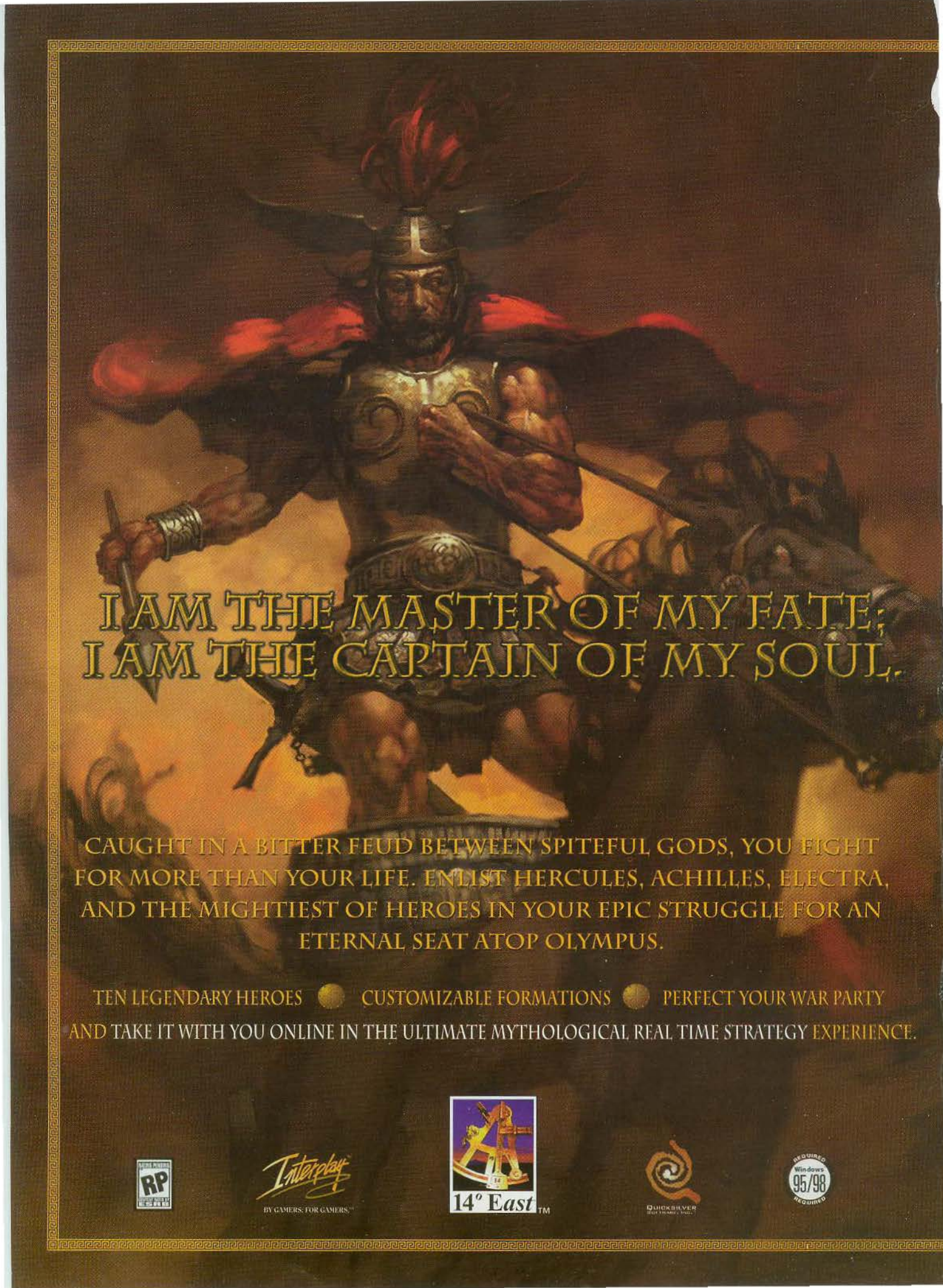
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ANNUAL 1999

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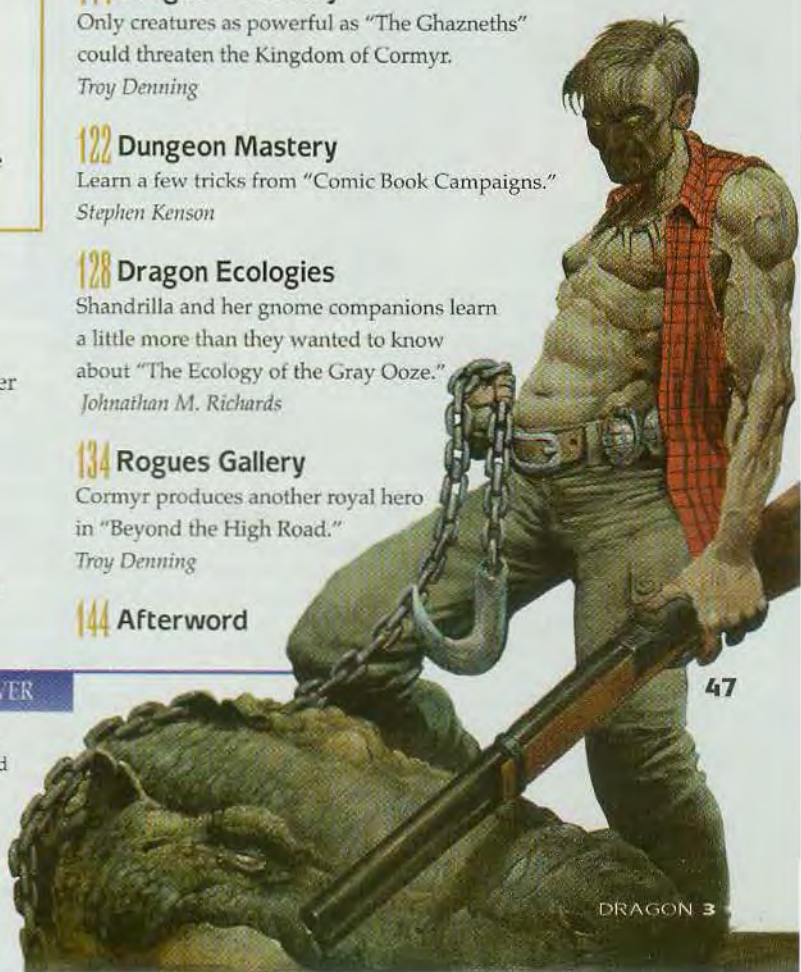

For this year's annual we are proud to present our first cover by Mark Zug. Mark's work has graced features in *DRAGON Magazine* over the past year, and his images have appeared on numerous game products as well. Look for Mark's cover on *DUNGEON Adventures* #81, on sale in June 2000.

Game Knights at

AD&D® Forgotten Realms®
Drizzt Do'Urden's Guide to the Underdark
Eric L. Boyd
Accessory

The famous drow ranger sheds some light on "the night below." Included within are reports on the drow, duergar, illithid, derro, aboleth, kuo-toan, svirfneblin, and dwarves, as well as the cities in which they dwell.
Drizzt also includes a few survival tricks he's perfected over the years, making this an essential guide for any adventurer intent on descending into the depths.

AD&D
Guide to Hell
Chris Pramas
Accessory

If your players are asking for a new challenge, tell them to go to Hell.
The *Guide to Hell* offers a wealth of information on the layers of Hell, including the secret ninth layer. Included within are statistics for the various rulers and their followers, new infernal spells and magical items, and a devil-slayer kit for players who want to kick diabolical butt.
Looking for excitement? We'll see you in Hell.

AD&D Greyhawk®
Return to White Plume Mountain
Bruce R. Cordell
Adventure

For centuries, White Plume Mountain has risen above the rift canyon, daring anybody foolish or brave enough to enter its depths in search of treasure.
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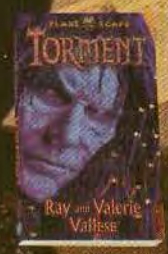
The smoking mountain lair of the sinister arch-mage Keraptis holds the secrets to three powerful magic weapons . . . and more than you bargained for.



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Novel

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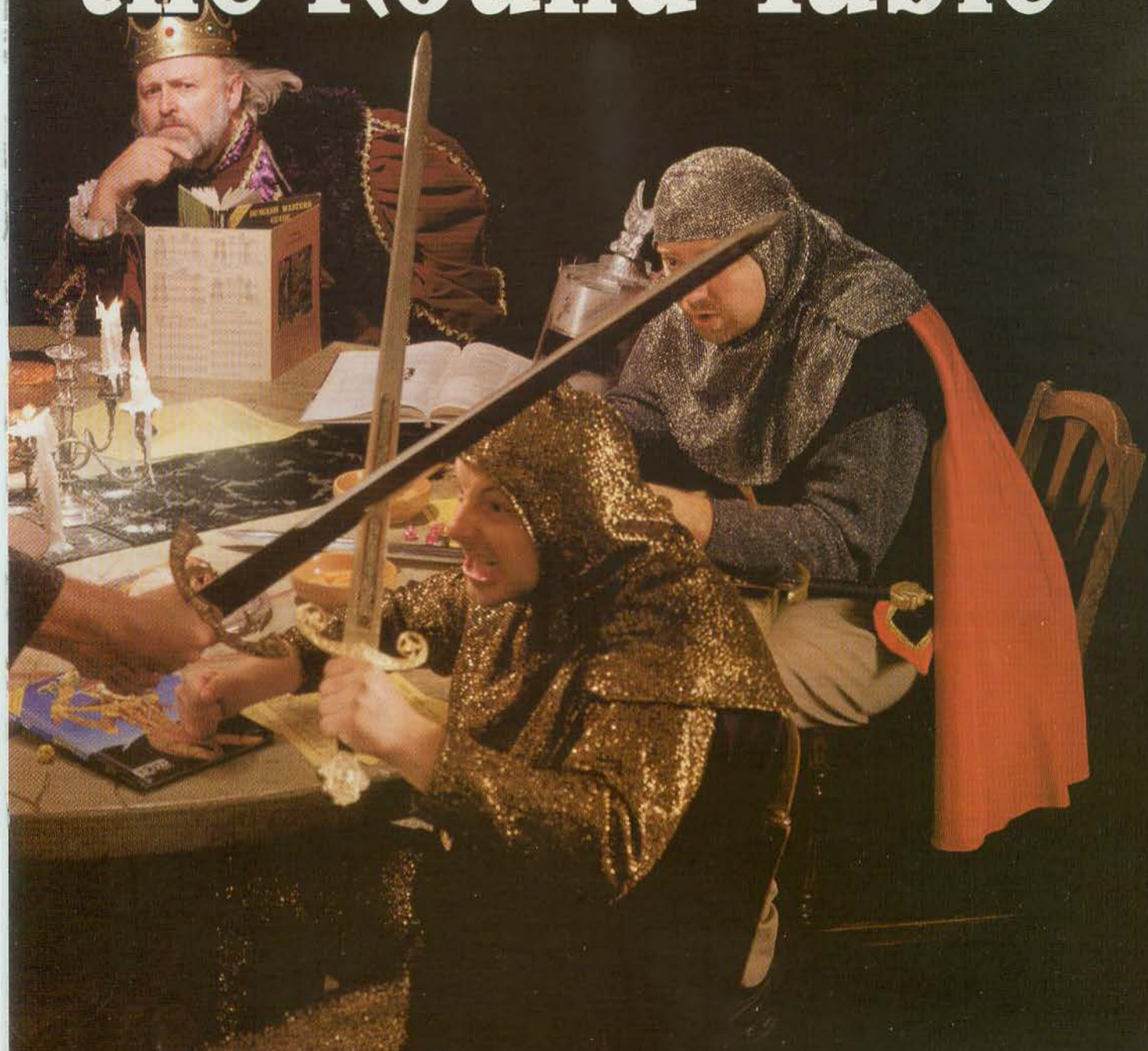
IN STORES NOW!

the Round Table



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The Wyrm's Turn™

25 Years and Counting

This past year saw the Silver Anniversary of TSR roleplaying games. What better time to celebrate the rebirth of the GREYHAWK® campaign, the emergence of a new ALTERNITY® game campaign, and—of course—the announcement of the 3rd Edition D&D® game? Even more dramatic was the announcement of Hasbro's acquisition of Wizards of the Coast, a move that not only created the world's biggest game company but also promises to make roleplaying bigger than ever before.

The Acquisition

The question we've heard most often lately is, "How will Hasbro's purchase of Wizards of the Coast affect the company's roleplaying games?"

The same people are working on the same products, the offices aren't moving to Rhode Island, and there'll be little if any consolidation of personnel. Wizards of the Coast has become a division of Hasbro, a unit large enough to keep its own legal, financial, and human resources departments.

It's back to basics in the Year 2000.

In the short term, this means business as usual. In the long term, we hope, it means that D&D® game and other Wizards of the Coast products can become more widely played than ever.

DRAGON® Magazine 2000

We're delighted to announce that some of the best talents from the magazine's first twenty-five years are returning to help usher it into the next century. Phil Foglio's popular "What's New" already came home in November, and—due to popular demand—Ed Greenwood returns with "The New Adventures of Volo" in January. Also that month, the Grand DM himself, Gary Gygax, returns with his own controversy generator, the "Up on a Soapbox" column.

Even while we're embracing the best of the D&D game's past 25 years, we haven't stopped thinking about the future. Knowing that many of you will be gearing up for 3rd-Edition campaigns next summer, we'll present more articles that don't depend on a single set of rules as we approach August 2000. These "think pieces" are sure to inspire your imagination regardless of which set of rules you're using.

Until then, you can look forward to theme issues ranging from the "Underdark" to "Riddles & Puzzles" to "Swashbuckling Adventures," including both idea-generating articles and useful "crunchy bits" like new kits, monsters, spells, weapons, and campaign details.

After the launch of 3rd Edition, it's back to basics for *DRAGON Magazine*. We don't intend to re-run every favorite old article from past issues, but next year is the perfect time to approach the D&D world as if learning to play for the first time. Whether you're only recently a gamer or a long-time veteran, we hope you'll join us in rediscovering the classic fantasy roleplaying game.

Dave Gross, *Editor*

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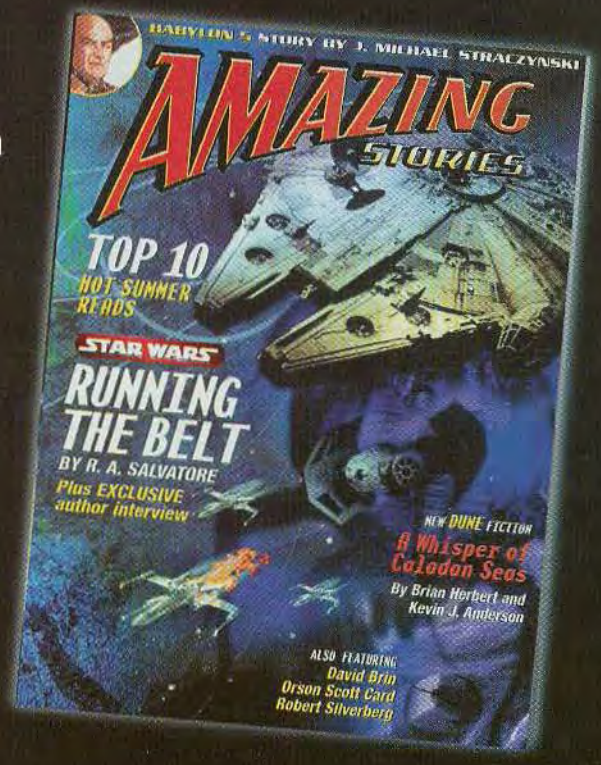

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50 Years of D&D® Gaming

By Gary Gygax

A 25-Year Retrospective

plus

25 Years of Fearless Predictions

Gary still runs AD&D at the Gen Con® Game Fair. One of this year's lucky adventuring parties included Martin Wright, Paul Stormberg, Paul Brackett, Willy Roop, Corie Chasan, Paul Coveney, Carlos Vigil, Mark Barrazuol, B. Matt Conklin, Jason Calhoux, Tom Evans, Scott Wood, and Chris McDuffie.

It isn't difficult for me now to recall events over a quarter-century of time, and I have been asked to do so in connection with another exercise, scrying! So let us begin way back in 1974 when the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game was first introduced.

Many of you might not have been born way back then. Many a young player asks how the game was conceived, for they have never heard of the CHAINMAIL™ medieval military miniatures rules and its Fantasy Supplement. That was the main basis for what followed. The relative popularity of the fantasy miniatures made us sure of things. Even before the D&D® game was published, we knew that it would be popular. Just how popular was not really understood, but I'll get to that in due course.

When Don Kaye and I founded Tactical Studies Rules in October of 1973, we had to be content with releasing a booklet of military miniatures rules, *Cavaliers & Roundheads*, Rules for the English Civil War, as the initial offering from our fledgling enterprise. As fine a set of rules as those were, both Don and I were anxious to publish the D&D game. However, that would require more money than was available to us, so we produced what we could, kept every penny received in sales, and waited impatiently to launch the main product.

I had written the first draft of the

Gygax predicts...

Now we move into more uncertain territory, passing the current time, even the predictable events of 2000, to peer into the future. Surely most readers will understand how I manage to do this. With inky pool ready in the electrum basin, magical energy in a nimbus above, the scrying begins! Follow along as we move ahead, year by year, to see what will occur.

Here then are my 25 Fearless Predictions!:

2000

The 3rd Edition is released in August, and there is shock and confusion among the disparate sets of fans. However, as it is played, the new work captures the hearts and minds of the vast majority, and their enthusiasm brings in many others. A few hundred vocal detractors of the publisher, the game, and all connected with it are permanently hospitalized for acute depression. Nobody misses them. (TSR also confidentially suggests that a publishable version of my original Castle Greyhawk and 40+ dungeon levels might be of interest.)

2001

Emphasis on the GREYHAWK® setting expands the number of persons utilizing it as the base for their games and actually attracts new players to the D&D game because of the compelling nature of the setting, its development, and online features.

(I now begin working on the Castle Greyhawk manuscript.)

2002

With the spring unveiling of a chain of 2,002 retail stores nationwide, WotC not only shocks the whole industry but gets a big boost on the Big Board, its share price doubling in the next week of trading. Sales of the D&D Game "Beginners Boxed Set" set new records for RPG success to add laurels to that crown in the Christmas Season.

2003

Via its new chain of shops, TSR unveils its live-

D&D game in the winter of 1972. It was a manuscript of but fifty pages, sent out to a score or so of wargaming associates all over the country. Some were in high school, the majority in college. Letters and phone calls that poured in following that distribution confirmed our assumption that the game was destined to be a hit. In the spring of 1973, the manuscript was revised and expanded to fill 150 pages, and about fifty copies of this work were mailed out to eager "referees" from coast to coast. They wanted more, and the volume of mail and telephone calls I received at home each day grew ever greater. Calls at midnight or later were common, and it was a case of "publish or perish" from want of sleep!

When in the autumn of 1973 someone proposed buying into our partnership, Don Kaye and I agreed. Arrangements were made for illustrations "on the cheap," this desperately, as time was precious. With the money tendered in the company bank account, the process was then moved into high gear. A local packaging company was contacted, and 1,000 small boxes with brown woodgrain wrapping were ordered. Labels for front and spine were to be done by the printer. I rushed the manuscript to the offices of Graphic Printing, then on Broad Street here in Lake Geneva. Assured that when it was "set" (typed on an IBM typewriter and plates burned therefrom) it would be edited and corrected, we stood impatiently by in eager anticipation of the culmination of this momentous event, the delivery of three booklets, and "pull out sheets" in a quantity of 1,000 each. Indeed, this account indicates just how "green" we were.... But despite the lack of editing; the rather amateurish quality of writing, layout, and illustration; and the clumsiness of the packaging, we were ecstatic with the result when it finally came off the press late in January 1974. This date begins the "official" history of the presence of the game, of course.

We had the whole shebang delivered to Don Kaye's residence where it went into the storeroom—his hastily emptied pantry. Every night for a week we gathered there to assemble sets, box them, paste on labels, and stack them on the pantry—I mean *storeroom*—shelves. A handful of direct orders were filled just before the end of the month, so January 1974 is indeed the official date of the first sale of the D&D game.

Next we filled the "big orders" placed by hobby shops and distributors. There were a few of the former, perhaps as many as five or six, who were taking half-dozens. Three distrib-

The Name of the Game

Allow me to digress for a moment to explain why we were so enthused about the fantasy project. It was more than knowing that fantasy miniatures gaming had appeal, of course. When in 1972 we began playing the new game, virtually everyone who actually took part in an adventure was excited, nay, enthralled, with it. It needed a name, so I made a list of two columns. I passed it around to friends and family. Choose one name from either column, or select one from each, I instructed. When my youngest daughter, Cindy, then but about age six, chose what most of the others had said they liked best, the matter was sealed. The name was to be "Dungeons & Dragons." This alliterative title seemed perfect to me, of course. Not only had I founded a "Castle & Crusade Society" as part of a large wargaming organization, but I thought the name also aptly described key elements in the game, and it had been my own first choice. So when I began to draft the rules, it bore that now-world-famous title.

action version of the D&D game. Many rural townsfolk are scandalized at seeing young people in bat-winged cloaks of varying hues doing a "buck and wing," not understanding that it merely indicates the player is changing from dragon to human form.

2004

Ryan Dancey commands the creation of "D&D Deep Dish Pizza. "As hot when you eat it as if a Dragon had just breathed on it!" Being the staple food of gamers, it is an overnight sensation. Over 90% of game shops install rolling pizza ovens, and the general populace eat it up.

2005

Scepter of Seven Souls starring Bruce Willis, a D&D film based on the GREYHAWK setting and "elsewhere" is released in the summer, with a sneak preview offered at GEN CON Game Fair. The movie is a box office smash, and thus some money actually has to be paid by the filmmaker to Wizards of the Coast.

2006

A major clothing manufacturer launches its new "Gamewear" line featuring the the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS logo. All parties are pleased as sales of XL and larger sizes surpass all expectations.

2007

Not to lose out, a major soft drink corporation introduces "Dragon Cola," and its extra caffeine and electrolytes enable one dedicated group to set a world record with a 108-hour D&D game marathon. Unfortunately, fatigue on the part of players is such that at this momentous time all PCs are slain when they and their controlling persons fall asleep, the former upon a bed of yellow mold, the latter on their crumb and bottle-strewn table.

2008

The largest gaming convention ever held in Europe is staged in Liechtenstein in July with sponsorship of the new Wizards of the Coast

utors ordered in really "large" quantities, two dozen each. Thus, by the end of February, we had shipped out about 150 sets of the game. What a smash success!

In a meeting around this time I set forth what seemed to be the prospect for our product. My comments went something like this: "You know, the D&D game is likely to appeal to most wargamers, boardgame buffs, and miniatures players alike, so that means around 10,000 to 15,000 sales. Better still, this game is one that will appeal to most fantasy readers—and not a few science fiction ones as well. I figure that means another 50,000 or more prospective customers when the word gets out. This is going to be hot!"

March was pretty slow, and we began to worry. Me especially. Had I overestimated the new game? The end of April of 1974 saw us with an inventory of around 700 still there. We had only a tiny ad in a wargame magazine and word of mouth to publicize the D&D game. Both were at work. It was in May when orders began to come in again, and these were mainly from shops and distributors. In September we had what seemed a lot of cash in the bank, so I placed a print order for 2,000 more sets. When they arrived at the end of October, we were out of stock, and there were backorders to fill. Orders were both more frequent and larger from then on. Confidence rose once again, and Don Kaye spoke as he had before of the coming time when he could resign his current job so as to work full time for Tactical Studies Rules.

Tragedy struck in January 1975. Don died of a heart attack. He was only thirty-six years old. Our partnership had been drawn up without a clause covering such an exigency, and Don's widow was not interested in continuing in the company. In due course, this spelled the end of Tactical Studies Rules and the emergence of TSR Hobbies, Inc. Before the corporation was formed, however, the operation moved from Sage Street to the basement of the house I rented on Center Street in Lake Geneva. Then plans were made for the new enterprise.

Meantime, in February of 1975, Heritage Models, one of our major distributors, offered to print 3,000 copies of the D&D game for us at no charge other than their keeping an "overrun" of 300. These 300 they would retain and sell to pay for the printing. We jumped on that offer, for it gave us capital to print other products. When in April the truck came and I toted all those boxes down to the basement, I wondered if such a vast store of goods would ever be sold. We had switched packaging by then, of course. Although booklets and reference sheets were still hand-collated, we had boxes with a white, printed wrapping on them, so no more tedious labeling was required. Time to assemble a D&D game was thus reduced by about 40%. That was lucky too, for the damned games were beginning to blow off the shelves. As a matter of fact, they were shipping at a rate of around 1,000 copies a month then. I did about 90% of that by myself. In May I went to work full time for the corporation so I could keep up with the sales of the D&D game and other products we were then carrying. For those wondering, my salary was $85 a week, not much even way back then, but it was a matter of love, not money, that motivated the effort.

In May, the assets and liabilities of Tactical Studies Rules were purchased by TSR Hobbies, Inc. I was then a shareholder in the new corporation. It was around this time that I sat down, analyzed sales, looked at the trend line, and made some fearless predictions, sans crystal ball. It was pretty clear that we would make a bit over $200,000 gross income by the end of the fiscal year in spring of 1976. As I was getting a fair amount of feedback from the fans, I had also discovered something that was totally unexpected. At least half of the

European Headquarters established there at the beginning of the year. With thousands of events being offered in all the major languages, so many people show up that the population of the country is more than doubled.

2009

With the advent of both audio and video in the average home computer, internet play of various D&D games finally attains such volume as to become the most popular game, leading all others offered on the web!

2010

De *Braug Strikes Back*, the sequel to *Scepter of Seven Soul*, hits the cinemas. Box office results are greater than its predecessor, even though Willis now plays the role of Racious de Braug rather than the young hero, Dart the Wanderer.

2011

At the end of the first decade of the new millennium, WotC exceeds the $500 million mark in revenues. After a considerable hiatus, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Game is once again assailed by TV evangelists in hopes that some of its success will rub off on them.

2012

Construction of the new film studio, "Pastoral Dweomercraeft & Artistry," is well underway. New producer-director Peter Adkison is the toast of Tinseltown, even though the new facility is in Seattle.

2013

When *Return of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*, starring Bruce Willis, Jr. is released everyone holds their breath. This is the premier of PD&A Productions, and it is an even bigger box-office smash than were the other films based on the D&D game. Discontent from the Hollywood region is kept hush-hush, because producers there admit they couldn't find a way to tap into the cash stream. Century City bans Dragon Cola and Dungeoness Crab from restaurant menus.

consumers didn't fit my previous profile. That is, they were not wargamers, didn't read fantasy, and hadn't really been interested in gaming as a hobby before their introduction to the D&D game! In point of fact, I was getting many requests for lists of recommended fantasy books from new Dungeon Masters (no longer mere "referees") who were anxious to gain source material for their adventures and campaigns. Astonishing!

In light of sales and the altered player profile I was then putting together, my pencil went to work in performing a rather easy task. Without hesitation, I made the following projections for corporate sales: In 1977 the gross would be around $500,000; 1978 would see TSR Hobbies making around $1,000,000; in 1979 we could expect $2,000,000 in sales revenues, 1980 would be $4,000,000, and 1981, all the way to $8,000,000! That would place us definitely at the top of the gaming heap in those days. Beyond five years I couldn't go. Based on what I saw from the current sales of the D&D game and the input from distributors, shops, and individuals, it seemed a certainty to me that corporate growth would double through that period, to 1981. This anticipated our continued publication of new products, mainly but not exclusively for the D&D game.

There isn't much to talk about in regards to the period noted, 1976 to 1981. The revision of the D&D game took place in 1976, and the new Basic Set was released in 1977. Thereafter the Expert Set for the D&D game appeared. Likewise, I wrote and the company published the core books for the new AD&D game system during this period. First came the *Monster Manual* (1977), then the *Player's Handbook* (1978), and finally the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* (1979). For "breaks" in between I wrote the "Giant" and then the "Drow" series of adventure modules. All of these products assured that the projections I had made were on target. Actually, I was 90% accurate until there was a monstrous media flap about the D&D game.

Instead of grossing around $8 million as projected, the furor of "negative" publicity drove sales through the roof ...

When that unexpected publicity occurred, sales were drastically affected. Instead of grossing around $8 million as projected, the furor of "negative" publicity drove them through the roof, and TSR Hobbies experienced a quadrupling of growth for that fiscal year. We couldn't quite manage to print and ship the games and books quickly enough to meet the new demands. Heber City, Utah, where the game had been banned, was the center of a virtual black hole. Despite our best efforts to get games to the vicinity, not a copy could be found within about 200 miles of the town, so great was the demand.

With such a year as that behind us, things settled down, and the sales figures for fiscal 1982 were a more modest $24 million and change. When fiscal 1983 was history, and gross income of a bit more than $32 million recorded, it signaled something important. At this point I saw that the game was likely to level off soon. While urging creation of additional material to support the D&D and AD&D games, it also seemed certain that something more was needed. Early in 1984 I offered a tentative plan to revise the AD&D game so as to expand the consumer base, and in the following months I suggested more

2014
The success of gaming enables PD&A to offer "The Gaming Channel" on TV. With a home at last, millions of geeks and nerds tune in to see their role models, including this author, drone on endlessly about little or nothing.

2015
Because of Internet play now dominating the RPG scene, the gaming community transcends national boundaries, and English is now called the "Common Tongue." The Peoples D&D Game Center is set up in Beijing.

2016
The film *D&D: The Ghostly Menace*, again starring Bruce Willis, Jr., is the hottest film of the year. Now even jocks are sporting "Gamewear," and all young rebels demand Dragon Cola. An exodus for parts unknown of persons holding that the D&D game is "work of the devil" passes unnoticed by even the tabloids.

2017
With everything from fantasy worlds, states, cities, and local adventure areas to programs for individual and unique designs of fantasy milieux ranging from world settings to local taverns produced for their loyal fans, D&D game product sales soar higher still. Hollywood gets its revenge, and the third motion picture in Wizards' PD&A-produced series, *Ghostly Menace*, is snubbed at the Oscars.

2018
The new Artificial Intelligence program developed by Wizards of the Coast for the TSR line beats the "World Storytelling Game" champion in four straight adventures. Fully two percent of the roleplaying game audience quits playing in protest of this "unnatural and unfair" development.

2019
Plans for the much-needed 4th-Edition D&D game bear fruit. Now the game is not only multi-genre

details. Being very much involved in the entertainment end of the business then, having moved from TSR, Inc. to DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Entertainment Corporation in 1983, I was not able to actively produce as much creative effort as I would have liked to in this period.

Difficulties arose at TSR in late 1984 and continued through 1985. At the end of the latter year, I separated from the corporation. Soon, though, TSR forged ahead and began production of the needed 2nd Edition of the AD&D game—although not as I had suggested, I hasten to add. Over the next few years, a new set of core books were published, and the game was given a slightly different look and direction. Along with computer game offerings that were quite successful, this managed to keep things level. That is, the game did not drop off drastically to some lesser plateau but maintained a strong leading place in the RPG market.

In the early 1990s, though, more problems arose for the corporation. Sales were slipping. What would become of the D&D game? Eventually Wizards of the Coast stepped in and acquired TSR, Inc. Many gamers worried, but I was one who cheered. Thanks to Wizards of the Coast, the game had literally been saved. Indeed, this move revitalized the company. In a relatively short time, new support material saw the game line surging back. When the computer game *Baldur's Gate* became a smash hit, it was apparent to all that the D&D game was not languishing but truly vital and awaiting fresh approaches to bring it back into full flower once again. Wizards of the Coast and TSR had been planning such a move, announced it in 1997.

Immediately upon gaining TSR, CEO Peter Adkison set about planning for a special new edition of the game. It was to be called D&D, dropping the less desirable "Advanced" and restoring all the former mystique and fun associated with the original name.

At the 32nd GEN CON® Game Fair came the "Big Announcement." There would be a 3rd Edition, it would be the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, and while it would be the same in concept and feel, many changes would also be included. All of this was aimed at making the game current in mechanics and better in play.

While a quarter of a century might seem a long time, in retrospect it is but the blink of an eye. The 25 years saw much happen to the D&D game. It was born, changed as it grew, then changed again. Unlike a person, though, the game is not destined to age, grow old and feeble, then expire. The advent of the 3rd Edition is certain evidence of that. As with the phoenix, but without a fiery death beforehand, the D&D game can be renewed periodically. This is indeed wonderful for its devotees, for it means that the familiar and beloved game will be there, fresh and exciting always, for us now and for generations to come.

When the first copy was sold I was on cloud nine. Now, over 25 years later, as we near the release of the latest version of the D&D game, there is another feeling that pervades me. It is one of profound satisfaction in having been able to contribute to the creation of roleplaying as a game form, to have brought so much enjoyment to so many lives. There's more, though. I am also pretty happy to be around and have the grand opportunity to add to the newest version of the first and still foremost of roleplaying games, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game.

Gary writes, "Believe it or not, I was over 30 when I wrote the D&D game. Indeed, I was pushing the 40-year mark when three core books of the AD&D game were done. Today I'm, well ... never mind!"

but has multiple character creation systems that are compatible. (This author is asked to review the material to soon be released. After so doing, he hastily revises his own competing system, hoping no one at Wizards of the Coast will notice.)

2020

TSR releases its 1000th Adventure module, *Return to the Return to the Tomb of Horrors.*

2021

Concurrently with WotC breaking the one billion dollar revenue mark, the Gamer Fitness line is launched. Dragon Cola diet version is touted. Female participation in RPGs rises sharply by year's end. This causes grave concerns at Wizards of the Coast as marriages take place and former gamers are forced to devote time to work.

2022

The first Doctor of Roleplaying Games graduates from Harvard. Raves on his thesis, *The Essential Need for the Dungeons & Dragons Game in Everyone's Life*, assure him a sinecure with Wizards of the Coast. The company opens its new operation in Tuva to better serve the growing demand for the D&D game in both Inner and Outer Mongolia.

2023

The D&D game is first played on the moon as those sent there to establish mankind's first permanent off-world settlement decide to take a bit of Terra along so as to not be homesick.

2024

The Jubilee Year for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Game, and the city of Renton renames itself Dragonza. Tarzana, California makes rude jokes, but these are ignored. Wizards of the Coast unveils the first of its "Holocenters," where gamers can indeed experience the D&D game the way it ought to be!

(Gygax, now age 86, announces to TSR that he has completed the whole of the Greyhawk Castle module but confesses he can't remember where he put the manuscript and maps.)

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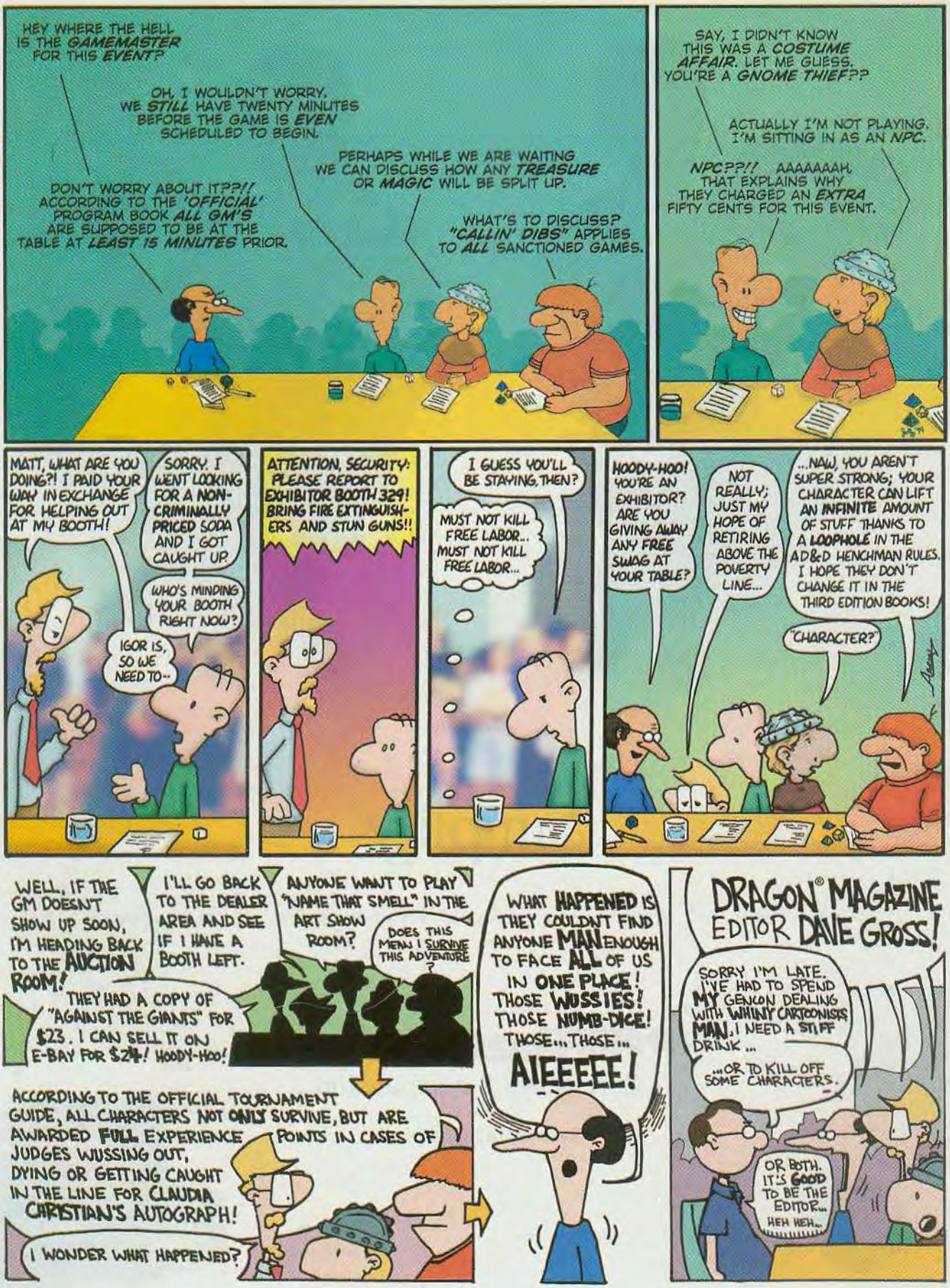
Nods of the SHOP Table

by Jolly R. Blackburn, Aaron Williams and John Kovalic


HEY WHERE THE HELL IS THE GAMEMASTER FOR THIS EVENT?
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT??!! ACCORDING TO THE 'OFFICIAL' PROGRAM BOOK ALL GM'S ARE SUPPOSED TO BE AT THE TABLE AT LEAST 15 MINUTES PRIOR.
OH, I WOULDN'T WORRY. WE STILL HAVE TWENTY MINUTES BEFORE THE GAME IS EVEN SCHEDULED TO BEGIN.
PERHAPS WHILE WE ARE WAITING WE CAN DISCUSS HOW ANY TREASURE OR MAGIC WILL BE SPLIT UP.
WHAT'S TO DISCUSS? "CALLIN' DIBS" APPLIES TO ALL SANCTIONED GAMES.
SAY, I DIDN'T KNOW THIS WAS A COSTUME AFFAIR. LET ME GUESS, YOU'RE A GNOME THIEF??
ACTUALLY I'M NOT PLAYING. I'M SITTING IN AS AN NPC.
NPC??!! AAAAAAAH, THAT EXPLAINS WHY THEY CHARGED AN EXTRA FIFTY CENTS FOR THIS EVENT.
MATT, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! I PAID YOUR WAY IN EXCHANGE FOR HELPING OUT AT MY BOOTH!
SORRY. I WENT LOOKING FOR A NON-CRIMINALLY PRICED SODA AND I GOT CAUGHT UP.
WHO'S MINDING YOUR BOOTH RIGHT NOW?
IGOR IS, SO WE NEED TO...
ATTENTION, SECURITY: PLEASE REPORT TO EXHIBITOR BOOTH 329! BRING FIRE EXTINGUISHERS AND STUN GUNS!!
I GUESS YOU'LL BE STAYING, THEN?
MUST NOT KILL FREE LABOR... MUST NOT KILL FREE LABOR...
HOODY-HOO! YOU'RE AN EXHIBITOR? ARE YOU GIVING AWAY ANY FREE SWAG AT YOUR TABLE?
NOT REALLY; JUST MY HOPE OF RETIRING ABOVE THE POVERTY LINE...
...NAW, YOU AREN'T SUPER STRONG; YOUR CHARACTER CAN LIFT AN INFINITE AMOUNT OF STUFF THANKS TO A LOOPHOLE IN THE AD&D HENCHMAN RULES. I HOPE THEY DON'T CHANGE IT IN THE THIRD EDITION BOOKS!
"CHARACTER?"
WELL, IF THE GM DOESN'T SHOW UP SOON, I'M HEADING BACK TO THE AUCTION ROOM!
I'LL GO BACK TO THE DEALER AREA AND SEE IF I HAVE A BOOTH LEFT.
ANYONE WANT TO PLAY "NAME THAT SMELL" IN THE ART SHOW ROOM?
DOES THIS MEAN I SURVIVE THIS ADVENTURE?
THEY HAD A COPY OF "AGAINST THE GIANTS" FOR $23. I CAN SELL IT ON E-BAY FOR $24! HOODY-HOO!
ACCORDING TO THE OFFICIAL TOURNAMENT GUIDE, ALL CHARACTERS NOT ONLY SURVIVE, BUT ARE AWARDED FULL EXPERIENCE POINTS IN CASES OF JUDGES WUSSING OUT, DYING OR GETTING CAUGHT IN THE LINE FOR CLAUDIA CHRISTIAN'S AUTOGRAPH!
I WONDER WHAT HAPPENED?
WHAT HAPPENED IS THEY COULDN'T FIND ANYONE MAN ENOUGH TO FACE ALL OF US IN ONE PLACE! THOSE WUSSIES! THOSE NUMB-DICE! THOSE... THOSE...
AIEEEEE!
DRAGON® MAGAZINE EDITOR DAVE GROSS!
SORRY I'M LATE. I'VE HAD TO SPEND MY GENCON DEALING WITH WHINY CARTOONISTS MAN. I NEED A STIFF DRINK...
...OR TO KILL OFF SOME CHARACTERS.
OR BOTH. IT'S GOOD TO BE THE EDITOR... HEH HEH...

GREYHAWK®

The World That Wouldn't Die

This Silver Anniversary year saw a return to the original AD&D® campaign world: Gary Gygax's own GREYHAWK® setting. While its fate might have seemed uncertain at times, who could doubt that the venerable campaign would one day return? While other settings reached more and different audiences, the world of Oerth remained alive in the hearts of its many players. Campaign Worlds Category Manager David Wise says the setting "made its comeback thanks to the combined efforts of fans and TSR champions."

The GREYHAWK renaissance began with the release of such products as the *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* and *The Adventure Begins*, both recipients of the Origins Award in 1999. This year also saw the release of several key Anniversary products, including *Return to the Keep on the Borderlands*, *Against the Giants: The Liberation of Geoff*, and *Return to White Plume Mountain*. Topping off the 25th Anniversary celebration was the Silver Anniversary Collector's edition, which included classic GREYHAWK modules and one unearthed treasure: *Deep Dwarven Delve*, the very last 1st Edition module.

The Year 2000 will be a turning point for the GREYHAWK campaign. "With the release of the 3rd Edition D&D® game," says David, "GREYHAWK will come full circle and represent the 'default' world of the core D&D line. "This move makes sense for many reasons, not the least of which are the many spells and magical items named after famous characters from the campaign.

Despite the GREYHAWK connection, the new edition will still be" as plug-and-play as you wish," according to David. "If you run a different campaign world, all you need to do is change the names." Just like in the good old days!

Next year, members of the RPGA® Network will enjoy a special relationship to the grandam of fantasy settings as the club launches an interactive GREYHAWK campaign similar to the immensely popular LIVING CITY™ campaign. If you've ever thought of joining the Network, now's the time to get in on the ground floor.

Gygax on Oerth

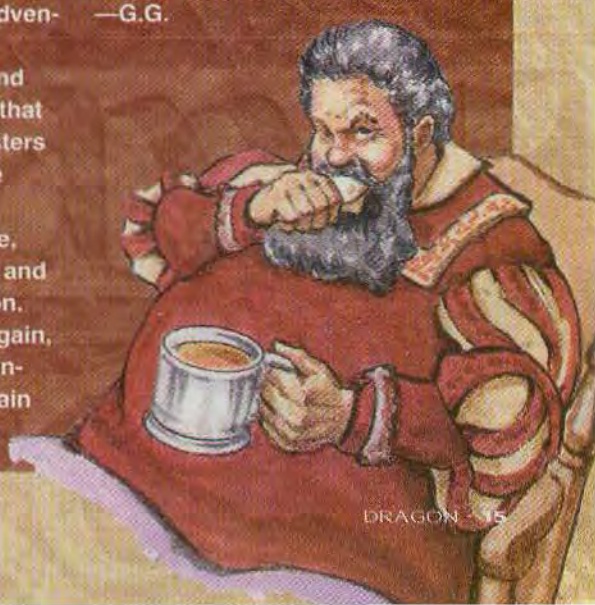
About the same time as the original D&D game was launching, the GREYHAWK setting was taking shape. Before then it was fine to have an amorphous world, use some manner of random terrain generator, and otherwise "wing it" for adventures in the outdoors. The change came as the campaign matured.

Using my own locale as the ground zero point, assuming the City of Greyhawk was akin to Chicago in location, actual maps served as the bases for the general shapes of the land masses of the campaign world. Changing topography freely to suit the needs of the game, following history hardly at all, Oerth began to take on a bit of form. At first it seemed strange that so many Dungeon Masters desired a campaign world setting. The DMs wanted a précis, more or less, of the adapted knowledge. With that, they could use their own imaginations to develop different campaigns based on the world core.

To facilitate this, it was necessary to do away with the alternate earth template and create from whole cloth. Using the more developed portions of my own campaign setting as the starting point, Oerth, Oerick, and the Flanaess were created. I was very proud, for into two maps I packed a world full of adventure potential, many races and nationalities, strange places, and unexplored territories. With all that came not merely strange monsters but whole pantheons of unique deities. The GREYHAWK setting became de rigueur for a decade, then waned, fell on hard times, and nearly disappeared into oblivion.

Hah! The wheel has turned again, and well above any dust and cinders, the GREYHAWK world is again standing forth proudly to offer its marvels to all DMs who desire a setting where players' characters matter, can alter the course of events, and impact history. As in the past, Oerth is a place of uncertainties, its history never likely to be fully detailed, all of its mysteries impossible to discover. Even when the most puzzling of conundrums is unraveled, the denouement discovers two new riddles.

—G.G.



Campaign Holidays

A little festivity goes a long way!

by Andy Miller

illustrated by Thomas Gianni

Look on any calendar, and you'll find that the United States alone has dozens of days of special significance. Considering the number of countries in the world, it's safe to say that a celebration is going on all the time.

Fantasy worlds are no different, and many probably have even more holidays. Any campaign world usually consists of several different regions or states, ruled by separate rulers and populated by a variety of people. The World of Greyhawk is a perfect example. In a land about the size of North America, there are no fewer than thirty different countries—and this counts only the established states. If you add to this the numerous free cities, elven holds, dwarven strongholds, and even humanoid or monstrous cultures, the numbers grow even greater.

Celebrated days can be considered either secular or religious. Secular holidays are those that are not considered sacred, while the religious holidays are important to a specific church or temple.

Secular Holidays

Secular holidays are usually recognized by the government of separate countries, cities, or towns, and time is set aside for the more important of them. Secular holidays can commemorate any of the following:

Birthdays. The birthdays of royalty or other important figures are often celebrated. Those feared or hated by the poulace often impose a self-important holiday and demand tribute.

Important events in history. Great battles, the formation of a new colony, or the day a country declares its independence are all worthy of celebration.

New discoveries. The discovery of new or hidden lands that allow a country to grow, and famous, life-changing inventions are often remembered. A land new to magic might remember the date when the first wizard appeared in that state or celebrate the first ship that sailed forth to a new land.

Religious holidays no longer practiced or condoned by local churches. These include holidays that are no longer deemed appropriate by the local clergy or outdated festivals supported by a church that no longer holds power in the area. Although the local temples do not condone or approve of such a holiday, the people love the holiday and refuse to quit celebrating it.

Secular holidays are often celebrated with the fairs, parades, speeches, mock battles, tournaments, games, feasts, the closing of businesses, or something unique to the holiday itself (such as practical jokes). Some secular holidays are common in different lands, but they usually vary from country to country. Many have traditions they have celebrated for centuries. (April Fools' Day is a perfect example. This "holiday" originated in France in the fifteenth century, when it was customary to pay formal calls on April 1, one week after the new year on the Julian calendar. When the Gregorian calendar replaced it in 1562, mock calls continued as a joke.)

Religious Holidays

Religious holidays are recognized and accepted by one or more prominent churches. Although some governments recognize the dates (especially theocracies or leaders close to the church), others do not.

Such holy days can celebrate:

The birth or death of a religious leader. Known leaders or holy individuals of the church are often remembered. The date of celebration might represent their birth, death (martyrs especially), or some famous moment in their lives.

Special days sacred to the church. Every deity has days thought to be especially important or holy. These times often reflect the god's portfolio.

Beginning of the new year. Different religions celebrate the beginning of the year at different times. Some follow the secular calendar, while others celebrate the start of the year according to the local zodiac or (especially with nature deities) the season that most closely represents the deity.

Historical events. Each church, like each nation, has its own history and a list of important events that affected and defined the clergy. Founding dates of temples, conversions of large groups of people, the freeing of lands held by tyrants, and the construction or enchantment of holy relics are events celebrated and remembered by the church. Encounters with divine avatars are seen as especially important and worth celebrating.

Specific lunar cycles. Changes in the moon are important to different temples (especially those that worship moon deities). Most temples of fantasy worlds recognize the influence that moons play upon the people.

Celebrations vary depending on the viewpoints and beliefs of each church. Temples and churches dedicated to good deities celebrate with feasts, rites, religious ceremonies, bonfires, prayer, rest, song, and dance. Evil temples or churches celebrate with all of the above but might also include debauchery, murder, sacrifice, and torture.

Good or lawful countries often forbid the worship of evil or destructive deities within their borders, and the followers of such gods must hide their celebrations, especially when such observances might attract unwanted attention from the local populace. Likewise, those who worship good deities in evil lands do so at their own risk, and such worshipers are often rooted out and destroyed.

Adventure Hooks

PCs can be swept up in various holidays. They need only be in the right place at the right time (or, conversely, the wrong place at the wrong time). Here are some suggestions for incorporating holidays into your campaign:

Turnout

A seemingly mundane secular holiday, long practiced by the people of the small town of Trinit, is imminent. The celebrations are typical of a secular holiday and include dancing and singing, as well as an odd ritual in which all of the young women in town go out to the old stone circle in the hills, where they are declared children no longer. It is the holiday's 100th anniversary this year, so the townsfolk are making big plans.

As the PCs enjoy the opening festivities, they begin to notice some disquieting things: Odd men in robes are prevalent in town, helping prepare the various ceremonies and celebrations. Intricate, rune-covered copper staves have been stuck into the ground, ostensibly for the flying of festive flags. Ceremonial speeches have no purpose other than to work up the crowd to a fever-pitch, and odd "traditional dances" closely resemble the casting of spells. An odd disquiet befalls the town's children and dogs, and the main ceremony to be held in the center of town promises to feature a "mock-sacrifice" to illustrate the people's civility.

The entire holiday is a sham. Several centuries before, three creatures were imprisoned under the town. Followers of Iuz (or some evil deity) learned of this and of a century-long ritual that could release these creatures. The one component of the ritual that daunted

the evil priests was "the willing help of 100 innocents," which the townsfolk provided adequately once the false holiday was concocted. PCs must stop the whole thing before the sacrifice in the town square is completed or see the creatures set loose upon the world, possibly under the control of the evil priests.

God and My Right

The PCs arrive at a good-sized city in which the temples of Atroa and St. Cuthbert are prominent. With the approaching spring equinox, both temples were readying to celebrate that date in their own way until it was found that both wished to have a holy processional down the city's main thoroughfare. The people, goaded by their separate temples, have begun to take matters into their own hands.

The PCs have stumbled onto a powderkeg ready to explode. Neither side seems willing to back down, and the local government (fearing the loss of either church's support) refuses to take a stance. PCs must deal with bloody skirmishes, clashing ideologies, and the question of how these two good-aligned churches could allow a difference of opinion to degenerate into such conflict.

The Great Cake

The PCs are traveling through Bissel and get caught up in the birthday celebration of the demigoddess Rudd.

Gatherings and feasts are prevalent, all of them featuring games of chance and skill. The whole event culminates with the presentation of a magnificent cake, which is shared by all of the guests at the party. Only moments after the cake is served, people start throwing it, triggering a monstrous food fight in the middle of lavish dining hall!

The food fight is actually in the goddess' honor, commemorating her skill at arms. Those PCs who partake in the cake-hurling earn friends for life, while those who decline offend the house where the party is held, perhaps even inciting a true brawl and offending the goddess herself. If PCs inquire, no one is sure how the tradition started, although the legend claims that on her eighteenth birthday, Rudd routed an entire battalion of bugbears with only a cake and a pair of teaspoons.

The Return

The famed Oeridian prophet, Kelendren Farseer, who lived almost 1,200 years ago, has supposedly returned. The man has answered all of the questions put to him by the Oeridian temples in Keoland and has gained a great following. However, many are not glad that the prophet has returned after all this time (though he claimed he would, according to the ancient texts). PCs are hired by the temple of Delleb (god of reason and intellect) to prove that this "Kelendren" is a fake. They present the PCs with a list of questions to ask the prophet.

The PCs meet with Kelendren Farseer and his fanatical group of followers. He proves amiable and kind, and he manages to answer all of the questions put to him. The PCs are even asked to join his cause—the putting right of the world. He says that on the night of the Blood Moon Festival, he and his followers will help to usher in a new era of peace.

This prophet is actually a doppleganger who stumbled across a monk of Delleb and learned of Kelendren. Using its *ESP* ability, the doppleganger is able to concoct reasonable answers to any question. Its true motives for the Blood Moon Festival are to kill and replace the King of Keoland or some high-ranking noble, faking Kelendren's death and martyring himself. His new persona will use the followers of Kelendren to strengthen the doppleganger's power base (by claiming to seek revenge for Kelendren's death).

Fallen Leader

After a successful adventure, when the PCs are feeling confident and have a lot of money to spend, they find the next town or city they come to very quiet. The few citizens they see are wearing mourning clothes. All places of business are closed.

A local government or religious leader has died, and the entire city is in mourning. PCs find that no businesses are open for the next day or two. Even simple services such as food and a place to stay are difficult to acquire until this grim "holiday" passes.

PCs who make further inquiries learn that the slain leader or religious figure died under suspicious circumstances. The local constabulary ask the PCs to conduct a discreet investigation.

Bloody Engagement

The PCs are in the County of Urnst on Coldeven 19, during a period of celebration. The highlight of the celebration is the presentation of Duke Karll (of the Duchy of Urnst) and Countess Belissica (of the County of Urnst). It is rumored that the two will announce their engagement (although this is a fragile rumor).

The PCs become embroiled in a plot to kill both leaders. Although the plan is set up to look like an attack by an assassin of Iuz, the true culprits are dissidents from both countries who believe their lands should fight directly against the evil demigod. Contrary to popular rumors, the speech that Karll and Belissica give is merely a resolve for both countries to work closer together against evil.

The Blood Moon Festival

On the night when curses are rumored to be twice as powerful, human sacrifice common, and evil outer planar creatures roam the lands, the PCs are hired to protect a young merchant named Terrexx. The man has all of the typical protections in place: a horseshoe over the door, a bottle of milk left outside, holy water sprinkled on the windowsills, and iron filings scattered under the cracks in windows and doors. All the PCs must do is guard the grounds of the man's small estate.

The young man is a devout follower of Kurell, god of vengeance. He has made plans to kill a rival merchant on the night of the Blood Moon Festival for revenge, to advance in business, and appease his god. He carefully sneaks out of his house and back in, trying to avoid the PCs. The characters must deal with any evil creatures that roam the night and try to prey upon the house, as well as possibly the merchant himself (who goes so far as to drug them if they pose a threat to his plan). If they successfully guard the house but do not see the merchant come and go, he has a good alibi. If they catch him, they become the target of his revenge

Andy Miller's favorite holiday is Christmas, which he enjoys the most when he gets a new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game supplement.

Example: Holidays of Greyhawk

The Flanaess region of the World of Greyhawk has many religious and secular holidays. The twelve months are quartered by the four festivals, all based on the set movement and phases of Luna and Celene. Some of these holidays are herein described in chronological order. This list is by no means all-inclusive but touches on the major celebrations.

Public Holiday–City of Greyhawk*

Needfest 1–7. The festival of Needfest in the Free City of Greyhawk is a public holiday that culminates with the Feast of Fools (described below). More details on this holiday can be found in the *Folks, Feuds, and Factions* book (pages 65–66) of the *City of Greyhawk* boxed set.

Descriptions of other cities' celebrations of the holiday can be found in *The Adventure Begins* (pages 41–42).

Midwinter Night*

Needfest 4. Also called the Dark Time, the Dim Time, or Handmaiden's Glory, Midwinter Night is the only festival night when Luna is completely dark, showing only a little of her face at the beginning and end of the celebration. It marks the winter solstice, the first official day of winter, and it is the shortest day of the year. The event is celebrated as a holy night by priests of Kurell. Also on this day, in the city of Greyhawk, priests of Rao, Celestian, and St. Cuthbert band together and distribute food. It is a holy night of Celestian as well; see *The Adventure Begins* (page 40) for details.

Feast of Fools*

Needfest 7. The Feast of Fools, beginning at dusk and lasting until midnight, is the culmination of the Needfest celebration in Greyhawk. More details on this holiday can be found in the *Folks, Feuds, and Factions* book (pages 65–66) of the *City of Greyhawk* boxed set and *The Adventure Begins* (pages 40–41).

Frost Days

Fireseek 1–7. Often cited as the coldest week of the year, the first seven days of Fireseek are especially holy to priests of Telchur, god of winter.

Great Moon's Glory*

Readying 11. This holy night for the church of Celestian, when Luna is full but Celene is new, is fully detailed in *The Adventure Begins* (page 42).

Remembrance Day

Readying 14. This holiday is new to the city of Greyhawk. Its first celebration in 586 CY marks the date on which the Pact of Greyhawk was signed the year before.

Blood Moon Festival

Coldeven 11. An unholy time for worshipers of Nerull, the god of death and darkness, this day is celebrated with acts of wanton destruction and debauchery. Held during the full moon preceding the spring equinox, the holiday is marked by human sacrifices.

Spring Equinox

Growfest 4. Considered the first day of spring, the vernal equinox is the point where the sun crosses Oerth's equator going from south to north (though actually it is a slight tilt in Oerth that causes this). Many holidays are celebrated on this day, including St. Cuthbert's Day, the Feast of Edoira, the Spring Feast, and Raxivort's Orgy, each of which is briefly described below. (Other celebrations during Growfest are described on page 44 of *The Adventure Begins*).

St. Cuthbert's Day*

Growfest 4. This festival occurs wherever a sufficient number of followers of St. Cuthbert dwell. More details can be found in "The Fairest of the Fair" by Bill Volkart, in *DRAGON® Magazine* #137, and *The Adventure Begins* (page 43).

Feast of Edoira*

Growfest 4. This religious and secular holiday commemorates Edoira, a religious figure of ancient times. More details can be found in *The Adventure Begins* (page 43).

The Spring Feast

Growfest 4. The most holy day of the church of Atroa, the goddess of spring, this is a day of rest, prayer, reflection, and thought concerning what the next year will bring. Priests of Atroa consider

it the first day of the new year. Although the entire festival week is important to this church, the 4th day is set aside as a day of rest, splitting the back-breaking planting week in two.

Raxivort's Orgy

Growfest 4. This "holy day" celebrated by Raxivort's followers begins the week-long mating season of the xvarts. The celebration consists of debauchery, feasting, drinking, and (of course) mating.

Desportium of Magic*

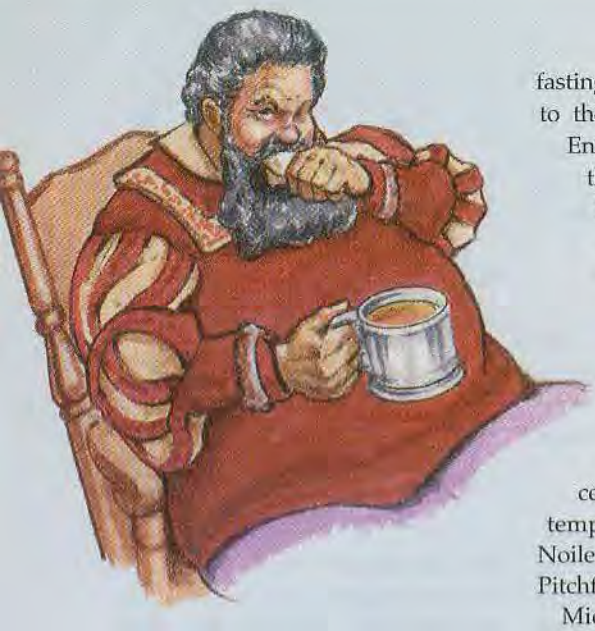
Growfest 7. The Desportium of Magic is an annual evening festival held in the city of Greyhawk. The highlights of the celebration include spectacular magical displays performed by teams of wizards (illusionists mainly). More details on this holiday can be found in the *Folks, Feuds, and Factions* book (pages 65–66) of the *City of Greyhawk* boxed set and *The Adventure Begins* (page 43).

Rudd's Birthday

Planting 10. This date celebrates the birthday of the demigoddess Rudd, who was reportedly born almost a millennium ago. The holiday is mainly celebrated in Bissel, where Rudd was presumably born, and consists of many parties and feasts, all of them full of games of chance and skill.

Sacred Days

Richfest 1–7. This festival is especially important to the priests of Sotillon, goddess of summer, ease, and comfort. The festival is filled with feasting, drinking, and sleeping. Followers of the church organize fairs with contests to find the



most comfortable chair, shoe, or bed, the best tasting pie or wine, and the sweetest tune.

Summer Solstice

Richfest 4. Marking the beginning of summer, this day is the longest of the year, when Liga appears farthest north among the stars. Several holidays occur on this day, including Giving Day, Enlighteningtide, and the Brilliance Celebration (all described below).

Other celebrations in Richfest can be found in *The Adventure Begins* (page 46).

Giving Day*

Richfest 4. The Holy Day of Pelor (A.K.A. Midsummer's Day) celebrates the height of summer. More details on this holiday can be found in the *Folks, Feuds, and Factions* book (pages 64–65) of the *City of Greyhawk* boxed set and in *The Adventure Continues* (pages 44–45).

Enlighteningtide

Richfest 4. This holy day dedicated to Pholtus is celebrated primarily in the Theocracy of the Pale and consists of fasting, rest, long sermons, and masses to the god of the blinding light. On Enlightening Eve, many residents of the Pale remain awake all night, keeping some light burning. Joking and frivolous behavior are frowned upon.

Brilliance Celebration

Richfest 4. This day is also important to followers of Lydia, goddess of daylight and knowledge. The holiday is celebrated primarily in areas where temples of Lydia stand (Lo Reltarma, Noile Dra, Gryrax, Nellix, Leukish, and Pitchfield). All festivities end by sunset.

Midsummer Night is also holy to Beory, Obad-Hai, and other Greyhawk gods. For more details, see *The Adventure Begins* (page 45).

Guild Days–City of Greyhawk*

Richfest 5–6. The two days following midsummer are set aside by various artisans in the city as Guild Days. More details on this holiday can be found in the *Folks, Feuds, and Factions* book (pages 65) of the *City of Greyhawk* boxed set and *The Adventure Begins* (page 45).

Dark Night*

Goodmonth 11. Also called Black Night or Star Night, this is the only day of the year when both Luna and Celene are new and dark. It is a holy night for both the church of Celestian and Kurell. Many in the Flanaess fear this night as much as they do the Blood Moon Festival. More details on the night can be found in *The Adventure Begins* (page 46).

Brewfest*

Brewfest 1–7. Known as the Drunken Days or the Feast of Brewers, this festival week is typically rowdy. Worshipers of Olidammara claim it as a holy time, but the church is constantly celebrating anyway, so it's hard to tell when the celebration truly begins and ends. Wine tasting and drinking contests are prevalent. The Pale does not celebrate this festival. In that land, the time is referred to as the Dunken Days, for priests of Pholtus usually prescribe an icy bath to those who are caught inebriated in public.

Other celebrations are described briefly in *The Adventure Begins* (page 47).

Public Holidays–City of Greyhawk*

Brewfest 1 & 7. Although Greyhawk as a city does not celebrate the entire festival of Brewfest, the first and last days are set aside as public holidays. More details on this holiday can be found in the *Folks, Feuds, and Factions* book (page 65) of the *City of Greyhawk* boxed set and *The Adventure Begins* (page 47).

Autumnal Equinox

Brewfest 4. This first day of Autumn marks the point where the sun crosses the equator from north to south, indicating that fall has arrived and winter is imminent. Although this day was once holy to the lost Autumn Goddess (and is still sometimes regarded as an unofficial holy day of Velnius), the only celebration on this day is Raxivort's Orgy.

Raxivort's Orgy (Again!)

Brewfest 4. This "holy day" of Raxivort is identical to the one on Growfest 4, and the simple creatures just don't have another name for it. It coincides with the second mating season of the xvarts.

Laughing Day

Patchwall 1. Thought to have been started by Zagig Yragerne, Laughing Day is famous across the Flanaess for always having a wet moon. The crescent moon appears horizontal, with both horns upright, looking like a bowl that could hold much water. It also resembles an odd smile to some extent. Laughing Day is a day for practical (or not so practical) jokes—the worse, the better. It is known across the Flanaess as a day for pranks, puns, riddles, jokes, tricks, and general fun.

Annual Greyhawk Council of Mayors and Manorial Lords*

Patchwall 8. This holiday was formed after the Greyhawk Wars to recognize the leaders of local communities. More details of this holiday can be found in *The Adventure Begins* (page 47).

In addition to the holidays listed above, many countries across the Flanaess celebrate various secular days that are important only to them. These include but are not limited to:

Declaration Day

Coldeven 10. This day is celebrated in the Yeomanry. On this date in 353 CY, the Yeomanry revolted against Keoland and closed its borders.

Council Day

Coldeven 19. In remembrance of the final day of the Council of Rel Mord in the mid-fourth century, which freed both the County and the Duchy of Urnst, these lands hold extensive celebrations.

Foundation Day*

Richfest 4. This date celebrates Narwell's founding. More details can be found in *The Adventure Begins* (page 46).

Thrommel's Day

Flocktime 5. On this day, the city of Dyvers celebrates its secession from the Kingdom of Furyondy in 526 CY. The day is usually characterized by parades and mock battles.

Freedom Day

Flocktime 15. This day was celebrated in the Shield Lands before their fall, as an independence day from Furyondy. Since the loss of those lands, few people celebrate it now.

Crowning Day

Flocktime 18. Celebrated in Furyondy, this day remembers the crowing of the first king of that land in 254 CY. It is typically celebrated with parties, parades, tourneys, and speeches.

Holy Day of Serenity

Reaping 10. This day is celebrated in Veluna as a holy day of Rao, though it is actually the anniversary of that country's secession from Furyondy in 476 CY. The day is full of religious singing and worship.

Rollo's Day

Harvester 13. Celebrated as the day that Margrave Rollo established the independence of Bissel from Furyondy in 481 CY, this day is full of drink and food. It culminates in a mock battle representing the Margrave saving the king of Furyondy from a humanoid attack.

Ivid's Birth

Ready'reat 8. This holiday, only celebrated in the Great Kingdom, commemorated the Overking's birthday. Since the collapse of that land, the date is all but forgotten outside of Rauxes, though it is still celebrated in that city.

Day of Treachery

Ready'reat 13. Only remembered in what's left of the Bandit Kingdoms, this date marks the day when ten thousand bandits gathered in Steelbone Meadows and were betrayed and slaughtered by Bernel, a priest of Iuz, and his servants. The massacre happened less than a year ago, in 584 CY, and is considered a pivotal event to the residents of those lands.

SO, I'M TRYING TO BUY A NEW SPELL BOOK, AND I'M THINKING, "HOW HARD CAN IT BE, RIGHT?" SO, I USE A TELEPORT SPELL TO GET TO THE NEAREST GAME STORE, WHICH IS, LIKE, 200 MILES AWAY, AND THEY DON'T HAVE IT IN... I GO TO MY LOCAL BOOKSTORE AND ASK FOR A SPELL BOOK, AND, I MEAN, THE LADY BEHIND THE COUNTER IN THE EMILY DICKINSON T-SHIRT LOOKS AT ME LIKE I MUST BE **OUT OF MY MIND**, LIKE SHE'S NEVER SOLD A SPELL BOOK BEFORE IN HER LIFE! AND THEN, SHE'S LOOKING AROUND IN THEIR DATABASE, AND SAYS THEY HAVE A COPY OF THE NECRONOMICON IN AND WILL THAT DO? I MEAN, **"HELLO! I'M LAWFUL GOOD! NO, IT'S NOT THE SAME! ARE YOU TRYING TO RUIN MY ALIGNMENT, LADY?** I'M ABOUT TO LEVEL, HERE!" BUT, SHE DOESN'T HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT... THEN, I TRY LOOKING AT MEGADOTCOM AND THEY SAY THEY **MIGHT**, **MIGHT**, MIND YOU, BE ABLE TO GET IT TO ME IN 6 WEEKS! I MEAN, ARE THEY TRYING TO GET ME KILLED?!? I'M DUE AT THE TOMB OF OBLIVION NEXT FRIDAY!!!

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With dozens upon dozens of sourcebooks, boxed campaign expansions, and adventure modules, the Realms is undoubtedly the most richly detailed environment for AD&D® gaming—and that's not to mention the many computer roleplaying games based on its locations, creatures, and heroes. Such is its breadth and popularity that Category Manager David Wise refers to the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting as "the king of sword & sorcery roleplaying game worlds."

The Realms have grown larger in the past year with such expansions as the *Sea of Fallen Stars*, *Skullport*, and *The Cult of the Dragon*. R.A. Salvatore's latest novel, *The Silent Blade*, continued the saga of Drizzt Do'Urden and companions, and the novels and adventure modules merged when Bob and his gaming group, the Seven Swords, wrote *The Accursed Tower*, an adventure module set in the Realms. Other fantastic Realms novels included Elaine Cunningham's return to the City of Splendors in *The Dream Spheres*, as well as Mel Odom's Rising Tide, the first in a series that continues through 2000.

The monarch of AD&D settings also received plenty of electronic support, both in computer roleplaying games and electronic resources. *Baldur's Gate* was one of the hottest titles on the market this year, and the FORGOTTEN REALMS Electronic Atlas gathered virtually every map from the Realms on one CD-ROM, making it easier than ever to explore the setting.

The year 2000 will see even more growth of of the Realms, with new campaign expansions and adventures. The undaunted Volo plans to survey Baldur's Gate (with corrections by Elminster, naturally), and Realms fans can expect to learn a great deal about Faerûn's secret societies and the mysteries of the Magister in other Realms products, including several new adventures.

In fantasy fiction, the oceanic conflict escalates in Mel Odom's *Threat from the Sea* series, and the *Halls of Stormweather* anthology launches new series of Realms stories set in the nation of Sembia. The first novel in the series is Paul Kemp's *Shadow's Witness*, slated for November 2000. "The new series will blow our readers away," says series editor Lizz Baldwin. "I can't wait to see the explosion."

The major hardcover release for a FORGOTTEN REALMS novel is slated for Gen Con® 2000. Troy Denning and Ed Greenwood continue the story begun in Cormyr with *Death of the Dragon*. No Realms fan will want to miss this turning point for Faerûn.

In the coming year, look for another FORGOTTEN REALMS CD-ROM, this one collecting a decade's worth of roleplaying game material. In addition, the sequel to *Baldur's Gate*, a multiplayer *Neverwinter Nights* online game, and the long-awaited sequel to *Pool of Radiance* all promise to take the computer gaming world by storm.

As if all this weren't enough, DRAGON® *Magazine* resumes its monthly coverage of Realms lore in January 2000. After a well-deserved break after completing the "Wyrms of the North" series in 1999, Ed Greenwood returns to the pages of DRAGON *Magazine* in January with "The New Adventures of Volo."

Greenwood on Toril

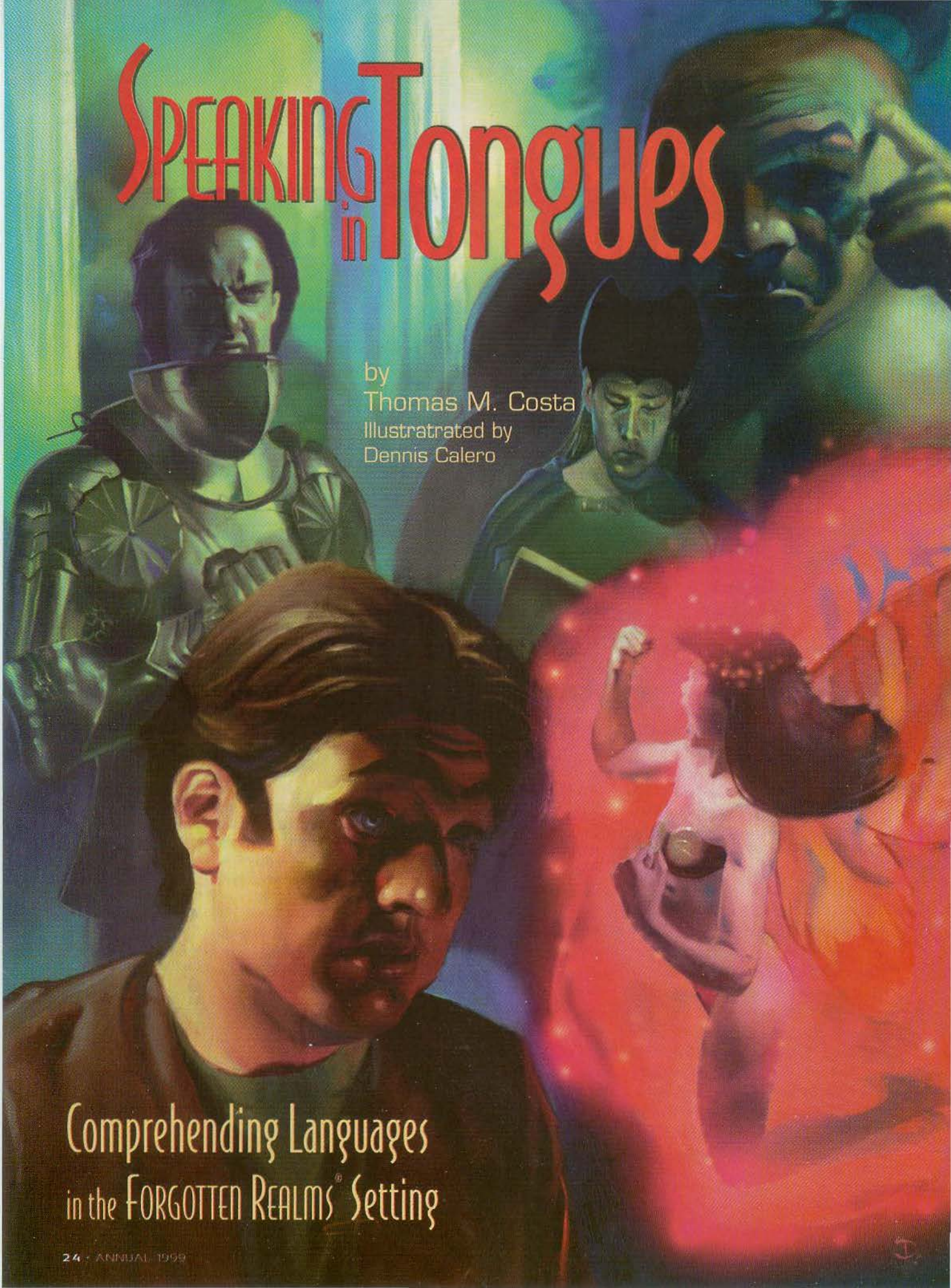
The FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting is about people, characters treated as if they were real. And that's not just the favorite individuals who become "old friends" we care about and follow the lives of, but the whole sweep of folk striving and dreaming and dying, their deeds forging a history.

From all of this detail is born the rich color that paints every ruin, castle, and village with life, color that sends caravans from city to city for reasons and shows us intrigues with consequences. Color that makes the Realms a place players, readers, and DMs alike care about, want to know more about and want to be a part of. That is what makes it all seem real.

Such richness is like a flame touching firewood to life, calling forth the desire to do heroic things, solve mysteries, know glory, and conjure the imagined beauty of soaring and terrible dragons, rearing unicorns, gleaming armor, and spells that burst forth with their own wondrous fires.

The Realms is a green, beckoning road through danger and mystery, leading ultimately to glory. I'll be standing on it waiting for you all.

-E.G.



Speaking in Tongues

by
Thomas M. Costa
Illustratrated by
Dennis Calero

Comprehending Languages in the Forgotten Realms® Setting

Faerûn, the western portion of the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting, covers an area larger than Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East combined, yet almost everyone on the continent speaks the same language, known simply as "Common." This convention makes adventuring easier but overlooks the richness and complexity of culture-specific languages. The following charts and new rules allow players and DMs to add even more verisimilitude to the already rich cultures of the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign.

Here is a survey of the languages of Faerûn, first by genetic classification into language families, then by geographical location in a linguistic atlas. The genetic classification organizes the languages into families, groups, subgroups, and major dialects to establish historical roots and relationships among the languages. The linguistic atlas denotes the geographic spread of those same languages. The atlas' structure divides Faerûn into four regions, moving from west to east, the West, Heart, East, and Far East. Within these regions, the atlas moves roughly north to south. The list also notes the map coordinates found in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Atlas* by Karen Wynn Fonstad. This product, while a wonderful resource, is not necessary to use the linguistic atlas.

Languages have been placed into language groups by comparing them to their closest real-world cultural counterparts (noted parenthetically after each language group) when possible. Thus Alzhedo, Midani, and Untheric were placed into the same language group, although they are still quite different from one another (as demonstrated by the nonweapon proficiency cost table). Everything else is invented.

Using a wide variety of languages is meant to add spice and atmosphere to your campaign. It should not become a hindrance to the game; if it does, simply stop using them.

Languages in Your Campaign

The languages in a subgroup share many similarities and, to a certain extent, are mutually intelligible. As a general rule, assume that the ability to speak a language fluently (the standard Modern Language nonweapon proficiency in the *Player's Handbook*) gives the character the ability to understand, but not speak, 1–10% (modified by adding ⅓ of the character's Intelligence score rounded down) of anything spoken in a language from the same subgroup and 1–2% (unmodified and at the DM's option) of languages in the same group.

Reading is easier. The ability to read a language gives the character the ability to understand, but not write, 5–20% (modified by adding ½ of the character's Intelligence score, rounded down) of something written in one of the languages from the same subgroup and 1–10% (unmodified) of languages in the same group. However, since the languages of the Rauric language family do not share a similar or common alphabet, the ability to understand something written in a Rauric language is the same as understanding the spoken language, 1–10% (modified by Intelligence) for subgroups and maybe 1–2% for the group. These percentages can be used as modifiers to a thief's Read Languages ability at the DM's discretion.

Keep in mind that the DM is the final arbiter on what the characters do or do not understand. Even if the characters understand 20% of what they hear or read, they still might not understand the critical aspects of what they heard or read. The characters, however, should be aware of this limitation. Nonetheless, this gives the DM all sorts of ways to mislead the characters into adventures. For instance, a PC might report, "I overheard that guy say there is a treasure chest under the third mound of the Rat Hills ... I think." Of course, the character might have mistranslated the word monster for treasure or missed the key word before treasure chest—"beholder's." Some people have a knack for linguistics. The expanded **Modern Languages Proficiencies** table denotes the nonweapon proficiency slot costs for learning language groups and subgroups. Each entry includes two numbers separated by a slash.

The first number indicates the number of nonweapon proficiency slots required for a character to gain a common working knowledge. This basic understanding is roughly equivalent to a fourth- to sixth-grade level and grants the ability to muddle one's way through common situations. Again, the DM should feel free to play with the character's ability to understand.

OPTIONAL RULE

Although the languages listed in this article add flavor to any Realms campaign, DMs might find that the cost of multiple language proficiencies prohibits the PCs from communicating beyond a limited geographic area. In games with widely traveling parties, consider giving the PCs a new language proficiency slot every level.

Alternatively, DMs might choose to allow characters to be bilingual or trilingual at 1st level at no nonweapon proficiency cost to the characters. In addition, DMs can also allow wizards, priests, and bards to begin with the Reading/Writing proficiency in at least one of their languages, also at no nonweapon proficiency cost.

LINGUISTIC ATLAS OF FAERÛN

North–South Region	West–East Region	State/People	Language
The West (FR Atlas Coordinates 5–15)			
Icewind Dale	Icewind Dale	Reghedmen	Reghedjic
Sea of Moving Ice	Sea of Moving Ice	Ice Hunters	Uluik
Uttersea–Northern Moonshaes & Mintarn	Ruathym–Luskan	Northmen	Illuski
Spine of the World & Icespires–High Forest	Iceflow–Anauroch's western edge	Uthgardt & Hartsvalers	Bothii
Ten Towns–Way Inn	Neverwinter–Luruar & Llorkh	("Civilized") Northerners	Northern
Southern Moonshaes	Southern Moonshaes	Ffolk	Waelan
Way Inn–Beregost	Baldur's Gate–Hill's Edge & Easting	Heartlanders	Thorasta
Athkatla–Memnon	Nelanther Isles–Snowflake Mts. & Deepwash	Amnians, Tethyrians, & Erlkazarans	Thorass
Myratma–Teshburl	Teshburl–Almraiven	Calishites	Calishite Alzhedo
Lantan	Lantan	Lantanna	Lantanna
Jungles of Chult	Jungles of Chult	Tabaxi	Tabaxi
Nanubel–Mhairhetel	Samarach–Mhair Jungles	Samarach, Thindol, Tashluta, Black & Mhair Jungles	Akûrian
Nimbral	Nimbral	Nimbral	Ruathlek
The Heart (FR Atlas Coordinates 14–20)			
Anauroch	Anauroch	Bedine	Ulutim
Southeastern Anauroch	Southeastern Anauroch	D'tarig	D'tarig
Frozen Forest–Dragonspine Mts.	Desert's Edge–Western Galena Mts.	Eraka (The Ride barbarians)	Erakic
Glister–Hillsfar	Snowmantle–Sulasspryn	North & West Moonsea	Tharian
Farsea Marshes	Farsea Marshes	Marsh Drovers	Andt
Teshwave–Proskur	Far Hills–Elmwood	Cormyreans, Dalesfolk, & Sembites	Cormanthan
Proskur–Nathlekh	Iriaebor–Pirate & Whamite Isles	Dragon Coasters & Pirate Islanders	Telpi
Mts. of the Alaoreum–Nleeth	Osraun Mts.–Asple	Turmish	Turmic
Nathlekh–Deepwash & Nagarr	Snowflake Mts.–Elbulder	Shining Plains & Sespech	Sespechian
Ilighôn & Wavecrest	Ilighôn & Wavecrest	Emerald Enclave	Drueidan
Reth–Elbulder	Arrabar–Lotoli	Chondathians & Blade Kingdomers	Chondathian
Thornwood–Channathgate	Mintar & Sammaresh–Landrise	Lake of Steam, Shaar, Lapaliiya, and Tharsult	Shaartan
Halruaa	Halruaa	Halruans	Halruan
The East (FR Atlas Coordinates 19–25)			
Great Glacier	Great Glacier	Ulutiuns	Ulutiun
Sossal	Sossal	Sossrim	Sossic
Great Glacier–Guidodale	Western Galena Mts.–Icelace Lake	Vaasans & Damarans	Chardic
Icelace Lake–Rawlinswood	Giantspire Mts.–Icerim Mts.	Nars	Naric
Mulmaster & Icemelt Mts.–Lyrabar	Tantras–Easting Reach	The Vast & Impiltur	Easting
Rawlinswood–Forest of Lethyr	Easting Reach–Ashane	The Great Dale	Auld Cormanthan
Rashemen	Rashemen	Rashemaar	Rasallesian
Kront–River Umber	Telflamm–Plateaus of Thay	Ashane & Thesk	Allesian
Thay	Thay	Thayans	Thayan
Dahst–Yuirwood	Ingdal's Arm–Glarendar	Aglarondans	Aglarondan
Spandeliyon–Thasselen	Spandeliyon–Thasselen	Altumbel & North Coast Cities	Alambit
Chessenta, Threskel & Ixinos	Chessenta, Threskal & Ixinos	Chessentans & Ixinosians	Chessic
River Thazarim–River of Swords	Alambar Sea–Brightstar Lake	Mulhorandi	Mulhorandi
Mourktar–Council Hills	Winding River–Azulduth	Untherites	Untheric
Great Rift & Underhome	Great Rift & Underhome	Dwarves	Dethek
Council Hills–Toadsquat Mts.	Landrise–Giant's Belt	Eastern Shaar	Durpari-Shaartan Patois
Forest of Amtar–Darmesh	Swagdar–Delzimmer & Dunfeld	Akaiuns of Dambrath region	Akalaic
Dambrath	Dambrath	Dambraii Nobles	Drow
Luiren	Luiren	Halflings	Luiric
The Far East (FR Atlas Coordinates 24–34)			
Great Spire of Yal Tengri	Great Spire of Yal Tengri	Gnomes	Gnim
Yal Tengri–Spiderhaunt Peaks	High Country–Ama Basin & Dragonwall	Steppe tribesmen of the Hordelands	Northern, Southern, and Eastern Imaskari
Spiderhaunt Peaks–Raurin	River Murghol–Godswatch Mts.	Murghom & Semphari	Muhjuri
Plains of Purple Dust, Fuirgar, & Raurin	Plains of Purple Dust, Fuirgar, & Raurin	Raurindi	Raurindi
Raurin, Durpar, Var the Golden, & Estagund	Raurin, Durpar, Var the Golden, & Estagund	Durparians	Alarric
Solon & Dustwall–Yehimal Mts.	Xontuil Bay & Great Sea–Solon & Yehimal Mts.	Solon & Ulgarth	Devic
Utter East	Utter East	Ffolk	Waelan
Utter East	Utter East	Mari	Mari
Major Foreign Lands			
Anchorome	Anchorome	unknown	unknown
Azuposi Nations	Azuposi Nations	Azuposi	Azuposi
Maztica	Maztica	Mazticans	Nexalan
Payit & Far Payit	Payit & Far Payit	Payit	Payit
Evermeet	Evermeet	Elves	Espruar
Dark Continent	Dark Continent	unknown	unknown
Zakhara	Zakhara	Zakharans	Midani
Kara-Tur	Kara-Tur	Kara-Turans	Trade Tongue
Ama Basin	Ama Basin	Pazruki	Pazruki
Ama Basin	Ama Basin	Issacortae	Issacortae
Shou Lung, Ra-Khati, & Khazari	Shou Lung, Ra-Khati, & Khazari	Shou	Kao te Shou
T'u Lung	T'u Lung	T'u Lung	T'u Lung
Kozakura	Kozakura	Kozakurans	Kozakuran
Koryo	Koryo	Koryans	Koryo
Wa	Wa	Wanese	Wa-an

SUMMARY OF LANGUAGE RULE MODIFIERS

- Fighters and thieves (at the DM's option) must pay 1 additional proficiency slot when learning subgroups.
- Fighters and thieves (at the DM's option) must pay 2 additional proficiency slots when learning groups.
- Native speakers subtract 1 slot from the cost of learning their native language group and subgroup costs.
- Learning a single language (the Modern Language nonweapon proficiency) from a language family different from one's native language family cost 1 additional slot.
- Learning a group or subgroup from a language family different from one's native language family costs 2 additional slots.
- Characters proficient in speaking or Reading/Writing a Faerûnian or Imaskari family group or subgroup may learn the other proficiency for no more than a cost of 2/3.
- Because the Waelan language group includes the language subgroup Druidic, this group is available only to druids.

The second number indicates the cost of a scholarly fluency. Note that this cost is not an addition to the common fluency cost and that even scholarly fluency doesn't mean the speaker won't have a foreign accent when speaking the tongue. This level of proficiency also grants the character some understanding of dead languages in the language group or subgroup.

Note that knowledge of a language group or subgroup does not grant the ability to understand or decipher secret languages and argots unless the character was trained in these languages as well. For example, a wizard working for the Black Network would likely learn the Zhentarim Argot, in addition to Tharian and Auld Tharian when learning the North Thorass subgroup, while a Shadow Thief translator versed in Central Thorass would be fluent in all of the tongues of that subgroup but the "Maiden's Tongue."

In addition, the common reading ability of ancient and dead languages is closer to a third- or fourth-grade reading level. Speaking knowledge of these languages is, at best, a guess.

The slot costs reflect both the number of languages in the group or subgroup, as well as the dissimilarity of the languages in the group or subgroup. For example, while there are seven non-secret languages in the Central Thorass subgroup, they are very similar, and a common knowledge of the language costs only three nonweapon proficiency slots. On the other hand, the three languages of the Netherese subgroup, which are very specialized and unique, also have a cost of three slots.

Reading/Writing proficiency costs are identical to speaking costs. However, because the Faerûnian languages use a similar alphabet, as do Imaskari languages, learning to read and write a Faerûnian language group or subgroup already spoken never costs more than two slots for a common knowledge level (even if the cost might normally be higher). The same is true of Imaskari languages. Similarly, if the character has a scholarly level of understanding, the cost is never more than three slots for a similar Reading/Writing proficiency. This reduced proficiency cost does not apply to the Rauric language family, whose languages do not share a similar or common alphabet.

Learning the language group or subgroup of one's native language costs one slot fewer than listed, to a minimum cost of one slot.

DMs should consider increasing the nonweapon proficiency cost of learning language groups and subgroups for fighters and possibly thieves by 1 slot for subgroups and 2 slots for groups.

Except as noted above, these skills should be treated as the Modern Languages, Ancient Languages, and Reading/Writing nonweapon proficiencies found in the *Player's Handbook*.

This article focuses on four language families: Faerûnian, Imaskari, Rauric, and Chultan. In addition, the languages of Maztica and Kara-Tur belong to different language families, as do some of the lesser-known languages of Zakhara.

MODERN LANGUAGES PROFICIENCIES

Note: This table includes only four prevalent language families. Many more appear on the Linguistic Atlas.

Language **Group** or *Subgroup*	Cost (Common/Scholar)
Faerûnian Language Family	
Illuski	2/3
Illuski	2/3
Waelan (druids only)	3/4
Waelan	2/3
Druidic (druids only)	2/2
Ulou	8/10
Netherese	3/5
High Ulutim	2/2
Low Ulutim	2/3
Chard	2/2
D'tarig	1/1
Thorass	5/8
Central Thorass	3/4
North Thorass	2/3
East Thorass	1/1
Turmic	1/1
Aglarondan	1/1
Chessentic	4/9
Chessic	2/4
Akalaic	2/5
Raumtheran	2/3
Raumtheran	2/3

Language **Group** or *Subgroup*	Cost (Common/Scholar)
Imaskari Language Family	
Imaskari	5/8
Ancient Imask	4/4
Imaskari	2/3
Imask Patois	1/1
Durpari	2/2
Durpari-Shaartan Patois	1/1
Lantanna	1/1
Rauric Language Family	
Mulani	2/3
Mulhorandi	2/2
Muhjuri	1/1
Untheric	3/6
Untheric	1/1
Midani	1/4
Alzhedo	1/1
Chultan Language Family	
Chultan	1/1
Tabaxi	1/1

Using The Language Groups

An asterisk (*) indicates a dead or ancient language. Languages in italics are official FORGOTTEN REALMS languages and noted in the reference portion of this article. Languages are organized based upon their similarity and historical roots into subgroups (the most similar), groups, and families (the least similar). The language groups are formatted and organized as follows:

Family (e.g. Indo-European)

Group (e.g., Germanic) (*à la* [similar real world group and examples of real languages])

Subgroup (e.g., Low German) Languages, e.g. Dutch, English (prominent and distinct dialects by region, e.g., American, Cockney), Flemish

For the purposes of this work, a dialect is a distinct variety of a language, differentiated by vocabulary, pronunciation, and/or grammar; it is used by a group of speakers within a specific speech community, especially a type of speech differing from the culture's standard literary tradition. For example, Cockney and Vernacular (American) Southern English are distinct dialects of English. Dialects bordering one another are usually mutually intelligible; however, over increasing distances, the differences between dialects might grow to the point where they are almost mutually unintelligible.

Other terms used in this work include patois, pidgin, creole, and argot, all of which denote forms of language that vary from the norm. A patois is a regional dialect with no literary tradition. Pidgin languages are simplified hybrids of two or more languages having only rudimentary vocabulary and grammar, are not spoken as native tongues, and are most often used as a means of communication between groups speaking different languages. Creoles are languages that have evolved from pidgin languages, have native speakers following years of usage, and have developed more complex vocabularies and grammar than their original pidgin roots. Argots are the secret languages of the underworld, the thieves' cants, and vary from locale to locale.

Where a patois, pidgin, or creole is listed as a type of dialect,

Faerûnian Languages

Illuski (*à la* Germanic: Old Norse, Danish, Norwegian)

Illuski	Truskan*, Illuskan (Moonshae, Ruathen, True [Luskan], Northern, Tarnian), Bothii (Uthgardt, Hartsvaler), Reghedjic

Waelan (*à la* Celtic: Cornish, Manx, Welsh)

Waelan	Waelan (Proper, Five Kingdoms), Cosh[1]
Druidic	Drueidan[2], Dælic

Ulutu (*à la* Baltic: Old Prussian, Lettish, Lithuanian)

Netherese	Netherese*, Halruan, Ruathlek[3]
High Ulutim	Uluik, Ulutiun (Iulutiun, Angulutiun, Nakulutiun)
Low Ulutim	Rengardt*, Uloushinn, Andt, Erakic, Naric
Chard	Chardic (Vaasan creole, Damaran), Easting (Mulman, Tantran, Procampan, Impilturian)
D'tarig	D'tarig[4]

Thorass (*à la* Italic: Latin, Italian, French)

Central Thorass	Thorass (Amnian, Old/Court Tethyrian, Zazesspurian/West Tethyrian, Erlkazaran/East Tethyrian)[5], Thorasta (Baldurian, High Moor, Reaching, Backlands/Prairie creole)[6], Northern (Ten Towns pidgin/patois, Neveren-Waterdhavian, Nesme, Luruaran, Llorkh), Northern Argot/Shadow Cant[7], Cormanthan (Cormyrean, Dales, Semban), Trade Pidgin (Heartlands, Inner Sea)[8], Auld Cormanthan, Chondathan, "Maiden's Tongue"[9]
North Thorass	Auld Tharian*, Tharian (Zhentish, Phlanite, Melvauntian-Thentian, Glistern, East Tharian[10]), Zhentarim Argot[11]
East Thorass	Telpi (Dragonsmere, Pirate pidgin/argot, Whamite)[12]
Turmic	Turmic
Aglarondan	Aglarondan[13]

Chessan (*à la* Greek: Æolic, Cyprian, Modern Greek)

Chessentic	Auld Chessic/Alambic*, Thresk*, Chessic (Western, Threskian, Ixinosian), Alambit (Altumbelan, Coastal/Reach)

1. Cosh is a little-known tongue made up of a number of creoles and patois spoken in some forgotten enclaves among the Nelanther Isles.

2. Drueidan is the secret tongue of druids. A powerful sect of druids dedicated to Silvanus were the first to develop Drueidan. However, an agreement among the nature gods of Faerûn spread the language to most druids of the Realms irrespective of faith, with dialects emerging among different faiths and regions. Dælic is the similar, but distinct, secret tongue of druids dedicated to the Earth-mother of the Moonshaes.

3. Ruathlek is the magical language of illusionists. It is said that the dead goddess of deception and illusion, Leira, developed the language with some of the descendants of Netheril, the wizards of Nimbral. However, unlike most illusionists, the people of Nimbral have developed Ruathlek into a language both magical and mundane.

4. D'tarig has strong roots in Dethek, the language of the dwarves.

5. With the recent upheavals among the *Lands of Intrigue*, linguists, especially those within those lands, have found themselves giving the same or similar dialects different appellations. To clarify, Old Tethyrian, or Court Tethyrian as it is sometimes and more appropriately known, is almost identical to the Zazesspurian dialect, except for its haughtier tone of speech, general verbosity, and greater usage of some of the Amnian dialect's phraseology. However, the Old Tethyrian dialect is not much used by the new nobility of Tethyr, many of whom are not human natives of Tethyr or had spent many years away from their native land.

6. The accent of the barbarian clans of the High Moor is so strong that most Thorasta speakers have an extremely difficult time understanding the clansmen. While most attribute it to the clansmen's lack of intelligence, some actually believe they speak a different language. Both beliefs are mistaken.

7. Northern Argot was the original argot spoken by the Shadow Thieves when they were based in Waterdeep. A slightly modified version of it is still spoken by many of the criminal elements of that city and its environs, including those in Skullport. The argot's roots are, as is implied by its name, found in Northern; however, it also shows the influence of many Underdark racial tongues. Shadow Cant is the almost identical argot currently spoken by the Shadow Thieves, though it has since added some words and gestures from the thieves of Amn and Tethyr. It has supplanted most of the old cants of Amn and Tethyr. The two dialects are mutually intelligible.

8. Trade Pidgin is a simple pidgin used primarily by traders and merchants across the Heartland of the Realms. However, following the Crusade against the Tuigan hordes, a number of military terms, mostly from Cormanthan, have worked their way into Trade Pidgin's vocabulary. Trade Pidgin's two dialects are, due largely to accent and vernacular, almost incomprehensible to speakers of the other dialect, unless the speakers have reason to traffic the areas between the two regions, such as the Dragon Coast, where both dialects are spoken. While both dialects are firmly based in the roots of the Central Thorass language group, the Inner Sea dialect also draws from the other Thorass language groups and the other tongues of the Inner Sea, especially Easting. Someone properly schooled in the language would learn both dialects as a matter of course.

9. The Maiden's Tongue is the secret ceremonial language of the Crintri priestesses of Loviatar in Dambrath.

Akalaic	Arkian*, Eshowan*, Telfir*, Akalan (Swag creole, Proper Akalan), Akûrian (Samarachian, Tashlutar, Jungle Akûr), Shaartan (Northern Laker, Southern Laker, True Shaartan, Reacher, Lapaliiyan, Tharsult), Sespechian (Plains Sespechian, Hlondethan creole, Western/Lizard creole, Middle/Proper Sespechian)[14]

Raumtheran (*à la* Slavic: Russian, Bulgarian, Albanian)

Raumtheran	Halardrim*, Rasallesian, Allesian (Ashane, Golden Allesian), Sossic

Imaskari Languages

Imaskari (*à la* Altaic: Azerbaijani, Turkish, Mongol)

Ancient Imask	Rauran*, Reian*[15]
Imaskari	Imaskari*[16], Northern Imaskari (Khassidi, Commani, Naican, Raumvira), Southern Imaskari (Tuigan, Naican, Dalat, Oigur, Quirish), Eastern Imaskari (Zamogedi, Gur, Fankiang, Oigur, Quirish, Khaghun)
Imask Creole	Gurri[17]
Durpari	Alarric (Shining, Desert), Raurindi, Devic (Ulgarthic, Solonese)
Durpari Creole	Durpari-Shaartan Patois
Lantanna	Lantanna

Rauric Languages

Mulani (*à la* Hamitic: Ancient Egyptian, Coptic, Berber)

Mulhorandi	Mulhorandi, Thayan
Muhjuri	Muhjuri (Murghom, Semphari)

Untheric (*à la* Semitic: Assyrian, Babylonian, Modern Arabic)

Untheric	Untheric
Midani	Noga*, Kadari*, Midani (Qudran, Pearl Cities, Pantheist, Eastern, Golden)[18], Maran
Alzho	Calishite Alzhedo[19] (High Calidrian[20], Desert Alzhedo, Lion, Arnadar pidgin)

Chultan Languages

Chultan (*à la* Nigar: Ashanti, Banda, Zulu)

Tabaxi	Tabaxi[21]

instead of as a distinct language, it is intended to indicate a greater degree of divergence from the root language and/or the influence of foreign languages. However, with keen ears and attentive minds, speakers of the language should still understand the gist of the speaker. Those same terms listed among a language indicate that the differences are so great the language is probably not intelligible even with a keen ear and, therefore, warrants distinction as a separate tongue.

The dialect spoken by the Moonshae immigrants who formed the Five Kingdoms of the Utter East is very different from the proper dialect of Waelan. The dialect owes its distinctiveness to both the isolation resulting from the region's mountainous borders and its openness to the influence of immigrant corsairs and traders from across southern Faerûn and northern Zakhara, as well as the influence of the original Northmen settlers who joined the Ffolk.

Nonhuman Languages

Oddly, the languages of most non-human races differ only in their dialect despite their regional location and distance from one another. There is, as yet, no explanation for this phenomenon. Some sages believe that this homogeny among nonhuman languages is an expression of the divine might of the nonhuman gods. Others scoff at this theory.

The following are the languages of the most populous humanoid races: Dethek (dwarvish), Espruar (elvish), Gnim (gnomish), Luiric (halfling, virtually unspoken outside of Luiren—most halflings speak human tongues now), Faerie (all goodly and neutral faerie folk, but kept secret from most nonfaeries), Kentaur (centaur), Jotun (giantish with many strong dialects), Jogishk (ogrish patois of Jotun), Daraktan (orcish), Ghukliak (goblin), Yipyak (kobold). In addition, many of the evil cousins of the demihuman races, such as the drow, are rumored to have purposely developed dialects that are unintelligible to speakers of the original language.

Tom Costa thanks Bobby Nichols, whose work on languages first gave him the idea for this article. With his permission, this article has used a number of the language names he created. Thanks also to Marc Triaureau, Simon Gibbs, and Julia Martin for their editorial touches.

10. Since the destruction of Hulburg and Sulasspryn, the East Tharian dialect has gone virtually unheard.

11. Zhentarim Argot is the secret tongue of the Black Network. It is rarely spoken outside of Zhentarim strongholds, such as the Citadel of the Raven, Darkhold, and Zhentil Keep, except by their nefarious agents meeting in secret.

12. There are very few native-born inhabitants among the Pirate Isles of the Sea of Fallen Stars, as such the Telpi dialect spoken among the pirates is something of a pidgin, having been heavily influenced by the other languages of the Inner Sea, as well as the cants of its coastal cities. In addition, while the Inner Sea dialect of Trade Pidgin is used to conduct legitimate commerce, the pirates have kept their dialect of Telpi a somewhat secretive argot in which they conduct their illicit trade in ill-gotten gains.

13. The language of Aglarond, Aglarondan, has been greatly influenced by the original green elf and current half-elf inhabitants of Aglarond, and its strong roots in Espruar are noticeable.

14. As a result of the influence of nonhuman tongues, most notably the wemics of the Shining Plains, the yuan-ti of Hlondeth, and the lizard men of Surkh, Sespechian's dialects are all very distinct, often in both accent and vernacular.

15. Both Rauran and Reian are long-dead languages from the Old Empires region, Chessenta, Unther, Mulhorand, and Raurin, thought to predate the appearance of the Mulan.

16. The tribes of the steppes have largely lost the knowledge of the Imaskari alphabet, and with it the ability to read and write. Some of the tribes have adopted neighboring writing systems, though most have not found their illiteracy to be a hindrance. The Imaskari languages are more fully described in Cook's *The Horde*. This source includes information and rules about the mutual intelligibility of the various dialects. Northern, Southern, and Eastern Imaskari have only been labeled as distinct languages for ease of use.

17. Gurri is the patois of the nomadic Gurs, a people similar to the Roma, the Gypsies of Medieval Europe. Gurri's roots are found in Imaskari, but the influence of numerous other tongues, many thought long dead (especially the Rashemi's Halardrim) have been noted by a few careful and well-trained Realms scholars.

18. Midani is the dominant tongue of Zakhara, the Land of Fate, an much like the Calishite Alzhedo tongue has strong roots in the native language of the Plane of Elemental Air, Midani has roots in the native languages of all of the Inner Elemental Planes.

19. Calishite Alzhedo's roots in Old Alzhedo, the language of the Plane of Elemental Air, are still quite obvious and strong.

20. With the exception of the desert raiders of the Calim Desert, High Calidrian is the dialect spoken by most Calishites.

21. Tabaxi is said to have its roots in a continent far from the shores of Faerûn, known only in far-fetched tales as those of the "Dark Continent."

A small official reference under the entry for the Anaconda mercenary band in FR15 *Gold & Glory*, by Tim Beach, suggests that there is a sub-Saharan-like island somewhere in the southwest Realms. In addition, in a January 1993 *Dragon Magazine* article, David Howery describes an unofficial Dark Continent, an Africa-like land in the far southwest of Faerûn. DMs can easily combine both of these sources into an Australia-sized island-continent far south of Nimbral and West of Zakhara.

"You say you fired on the suspect?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you..."

"What is it, Jennings?"

"Sand, sir. There's...there's nothing but sand where the body should be."

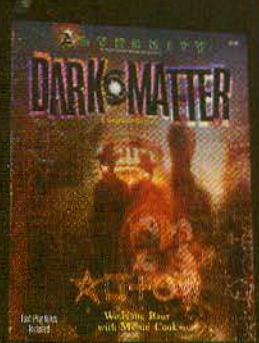
"Did anybody see you?"

"Negative. Sir..."

"Good. Get out of there right now...there are probably more of them."

"More of what, sir...?"

CLICK



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The Epic Fantasy Campaign Continues

How many gamers can trace their interest in roleplaying back to a trio of novels featuring a world besieged by dragon armies?

Even veteran gamers took notice when the DRAGONLANCE® campaign arrived in the early 80s. Never before had roleplaying adventures and fantasy novels been so closely linked, and both readers and gamers rejoiced. For the past fifteen years, the world of Krynn has been home to the imaginations of dozens of authors and designers, as well as thousands upon thousands of readers and roleplayers.

"Game support [for the DRAGONLANCE line] has been relatively light in the past few years," notes Worlds Category Manager David Wise, "but as Weis and Hickman's new *War of Souls* trilogy brings new life to the world of Krynn, we'll continue to release new roleplaying game products."

Stan! Brown has been one of the DRAGONLANCE campaign's shepherds in recent years. Looking back on the past year's products, he notes, "The year started with the release of *The Sylvan Veil*, an exhaustive exploration of the Silvanesti elves but also something else—the return of the AD&D® game as an integral part of DRAGONLANCE games.

"The DRAGONLANCE Team," Stan! reports, "after much discussion and debate, unanimously decided that since characters, story, and setting are what make Ansalon come to life, we should make it as easy as possible for players of all games to take their campaigns into the world of Krynn." All the 1999 products contained statistics for both the SAGA® and AD&D games, as will all products in the foreseeable future.

"Of course, the big news of the year was the release of the DRAGONLANCE Chronicles 15th Anniversary Edition. We took advantage of the celebrations for this milestone to look back on where DRAGONLANCE began—the Chronicles trilogy and the original DL1–15 game modules—and reinterpret them for a '90s audience. The Anniversary Edition is not a reprint of previous material, but rather a new look at the story that started it all, examining the story as a whole campaign and providing scenes never before adapted for roleplaying.

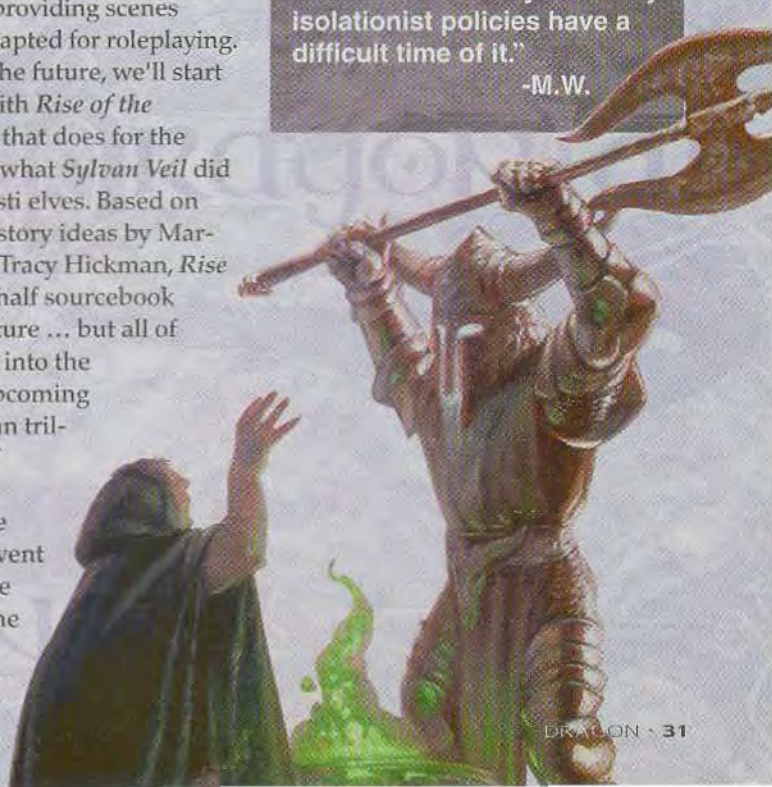
"Looking to the future, we'll start the year 2000 with *Rise of the Titans*—a book that does for the ogres of Krynn what *Sylvan Veil* did for the Sylvanesti elves. Based on adventure and story ideas by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, *Rise of the Titans* is half sourcebook and half adventure ... but all of it leads directly into the events of the upcoming Weis & Hickman trilogy, *The War of Souls*."

Of course, the most exciting event next year will be the change to the 3rd Edition D&D® game. Fans of the FIFTH AGE® game shouldn't fret, as David Wise promises that SAGA Rules will still be included in future products. For D&D game players, however, the year 2000 will be a wonderful time to return to a favorite fantasy world.

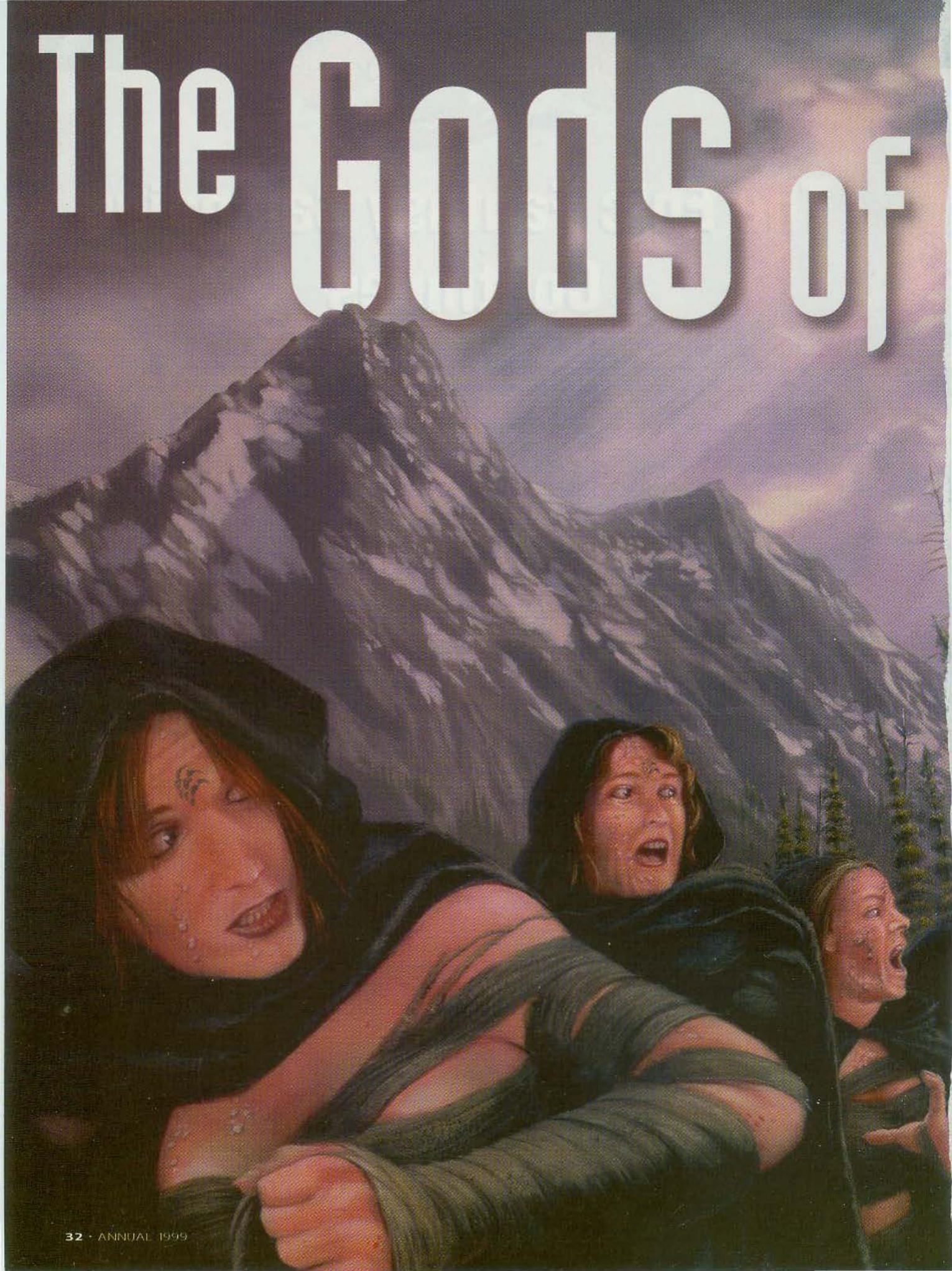
Weis on Krynn:

When asked what makes Krynn unique among the AD&D game fantasy worlds, Margaret Weis had this to say: "For me, what makes the DRAGONLANCE setting different from other worlds is its small size. Rather like Europe, what happens in one realm directly affects the realms around it. Thus those who try to live by isolationist policies have a difficult time of it."

-M.W.

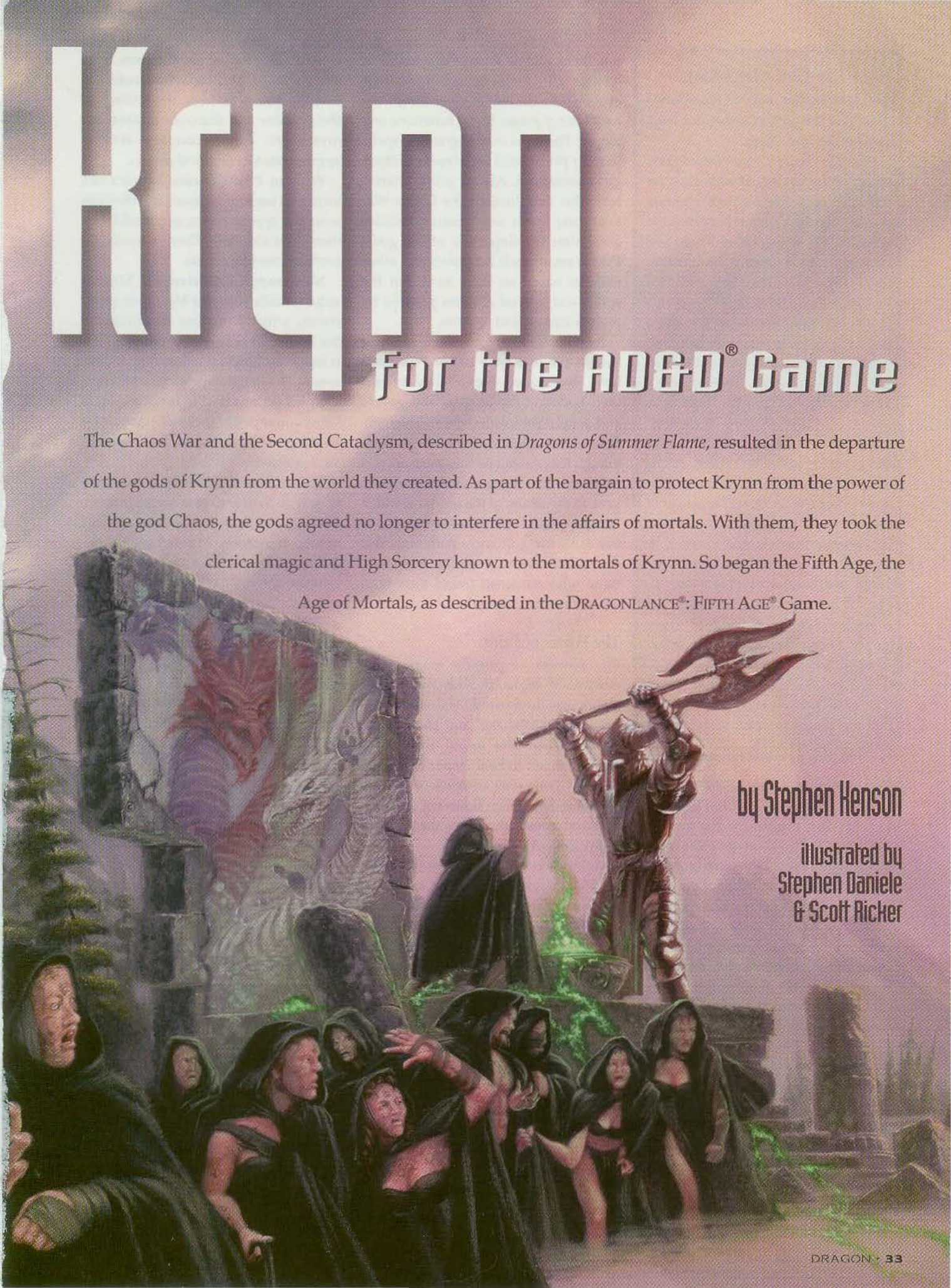


The Gods of



Krynn for the AD&D® Game

The Chaos War and the Second Cataclysm, described in *Dragons of Summer Flame*, resulted in the departure of the gods of Krynn from the world they created. As part of the bargain to protect Krynn from the power of the god Chaos, the gods agreed no longer to interfere in the affairs of mortals. With them, they took the clerical magic and High Sorcery known to the mortals of Krynn. So began the Fifth Age, the Age of Mortals, as described in the DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE® Game.



by Stephen Kenson

illustrated by Stephen Daniele & Scott Ricker

The High God and Chaos

Two other deities must be noted when discussing the gods of Krynn: the High God and the god Chaos.

The High God is a mysterious figure, shrouded in legend. Stories say that "he" (the High God is actually beyond concepts such as gender) created the universe and the world of Krynn and created the other gods to be caretakers of the world. The High God then withdrew from Krynn to allow events to unfold. Some believe that the Chaos War and the departure of the gods from Krynn were all parts of the High God's design, that mortals were deemed ready to fend for themselves without the interference of the gods.

The god Chaos is the embodiment of the primal chaos that existed at the dawn of time, out of which the High God formed the universe. The power of Chaos was trapped within the Graygem of Gargath and released by the Irda. This unleashed Chaos on Krynn and led to the Chaos War. As part of an agreement to spare the world from Chaos, the gods of Krynn agreed to depart and no longer interfere with mortal affairs.

Neither the High God nor Chaos have priests of any sort; they are conceptual beings beyond such earthly connections.

For players using the AD&D® rules to play a campaign in the Fifth Age, the following profiles of the gods of Krynn and their followers offer information on how to modify clerical magic to account for the departure of the gods. Priests are no longer granted spells by their deities. Instead, their power comes from the faith in their hearts. GMs and players of the DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE Game can use the information in this series as a supplement to the material on the gods provided in *Heroes of Hope.*

The Departure of the Gods

With the end of the Chaos War, the gods of Krynn swore never again to interfere in the affairs of mortals. Although the faithful believe that their gods still watch over them, for all intents and purposes, the gods have left Krynn. There is no chance of divine intervention there, and no form of magic able to contact the gods or summon their avatars (like the *bead of summoning* from a *necklace of prayer beads*) functions any longer. The gods ceased granting spells to their priests and all prayers to them go unanswered. AD&D priest characters who live through the Chaos War find their spells and granted abilities gone after the departure of the gods. Priests retain their hit points and other abilities based on their level, but the spells and special abilities granted by their deities are lost to them.

As with the First Cataclysm, many of the people of Krynn believe the gods have abandoned them. They turned their backs on the temples and groves and sought solace elsewhere. The truly faithful maintain their worship, even though they cannot be sure their prayers are heard. Since the gods no longer intervene in the affairs of the mortal world, a worshiper has nothing more than his or her faith for guidance. Although this drove some away from the true gods, those who remained found their faith tested and strengthened.

The Power of Faith

The powers of priestly magic were eventually replaced with the arts of mysticism, discovered by Goldmoon—priestess of Mishakal and Hero of the Lance—when she found the power within herself to heal Jasper Fireforge, who lay dying after an attack on the city of Solace. Mysticism flows not from the gods but from within, from the magic of a strong heart and spirit.

Goldmoon's discovery spread to the people of Krynn like wildfire, and many former priests and new students came to the Citadel of Light to learn the ways of mysticism. In the AD&D game this discovery leads to the creation of a new priest character kit: the Krynn Mystic.

The Krynn Mystic Kit

Mystics are priests who cast spells using their inner strength and faith rather than the direct intervention of a divine power. They have the normal priest hit dice, saving throws, and advancement rate but are freed from many of the restrictions. On the other hand, their powers are limited in some ways due to the inaccessibility of the gods of Krynn.

Secondary Skills: Mystics come from every walk of life. People from nobles to humble peasants hear the calling of their hearts and discover a talent for mysticism. Any secondary skill is appropriate to a mystic character.

Weapon Proficiencies: Mystics can learn and use any weapon, and they can wear any type of armor, as permitted by their particular faith. They gain weapon proficiencies like priests.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Mystics automatically have the Mysticism proficiency, which functions identically to the Spellcraft proficiency except that it is based on Wisdom rather than Intelligence. The Religion proficiency is common among mystics but is not required. Other priest proficiencies like Astrology, Healing, and Herbalism are common among mystics.

Special Benefits: Mystics do not have to pray to a deity to gain spells. Instead, a mystic meditates for the same amount of time and chooses desired spells from the available spell lists. Mystics gain the same number of spells per level as other priests. The spheres of priest spells available to a mystic are based on the mystic's patron deity, but it is a restriction of the mystic's faith and education, not a requirement of the deity.

Some mystics choose not to devote themselves to a deity. They rely solely on spiritual strength and beliefs. These mystics can choose which spheres they have access to when they begin play. They can choose access to major five spheres and minor to two spheres.

Special Hindrances: Mystics lack the support of a deity. They cannot use spells that contact, summon, or draw directly on the power of a deity. The following priest spells do not exist in the Fifth Age of Krynn: *abjure, commune, gate, holy word, raise dead, reincarnate, resurrection,* or any spells from the sphere of Time (from the *Tome of Magic*). Mystics cannot turn undead, although they can cast spells that affect them. Mystics gain no granted powers; their magical power comes from within. Priest spells that require a holy symbol, holy water, or similar trappings still use those material components in the Fifth Age, although their power is based on the mystic's faith in the symbol rather than the intervention of a divine power.

Races: Members of any race on Krynn can become mystics. Demihumans can become multiclassed mystics in the same combinations as priests.

Heathen Priests

With the absence of the true gods, new faiths have sprung up to compete with their cults. A mystic follower of one of these faiths can cast spells just as well as a mystic follower of the true gods. Without direct evidence of the intervention of the true gods, these cults have grown rapidly. There's no real means of proving the "truth" or "falsehood" behind religious belief in the Fifth Age of Krynn apart from the power of faith.

DMs can use these cults to introduce new religions and even new gods to the world of Krynn. These might be faiths brought by visitors from other planes or started by inspired mystics or even charlatans. The religion might be concerned solely with finding a replacement for the gods who "abandoned" Krynn, or it might be devoted to the acquisition of power. At least one dragon started a cult that worshiped it as a god in the Fifth Age; other dragons might do the same.

The one key element of any new cult is the fact that no deity or divine power can directly intervene in the affairs of Krynn in the Age of Mortals. The only proof of any religion's truth and value lies in the faith of its followers.

Medallion of Faith

These magical items are found in the hands of priests of the Gods of Good. They are silver medallions engraved with the symbol of one of the gods. In the hands of a priest of 5th level or higher, a *medallion of faith* can create a new medallions for converts to the true gods. Every new priest of the Gods of Good receives a *medallion of faith* as part of his or her training.

The *medallion of faith* functions as the priest's holy symbol for casting spells. It also provides the following powers, each once per day: *bless*, *protection from evil 10' radius*, and *slow poison* (on the wearer only). In the hands of a priest of 9th level or higher, the *medallion* can also *detect evil*. The amulet glows pale blue and chimes when touched by any evil person or object.

Gods of Good

Paladine, the Dragon Lord

Portfolio: Order, hope, light, guardianship, rulership, good draons
Aliases: Draco Paladin (Ergoth), Skyblade (Kendermore), Dragonlord (Mithas), E'li (Silvanesti), Thak the Hammer (Thorbardin), Bah'Mut (Istar), the Great Dragon (Solamnia), Fizban (Goodlund), Platinum Father (Dragons).
Symbol: Silver triangle, pine tree (Silvanesti), anvil (Thorbardin)
Worshiper's Alignment: Any Good
Clergy's Alignment: Any Good
Weapons: Any
Armor: Any
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Charm, Guardian, Healing, Law, Protection, Sun, Wards
Minor Spheres: Combat, Thought, War, plus *reflecting pool*
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Paladine is the supreme god of goodness and law. He speaks for the Gods of Good and leads by example rather than restriction. Paladine and Takhisis created the first dragons, although Takhisis later corrupted them, and Paladine replaced them by creating the good metallic dragons. Paladine, along with his sons Kiri-Jolith and Habbakuk, established the Knights of Solamnia and gave the secrets of the dragonlance to mortals to drive off Takhisis and her evil dragons. During the War of the Lance, Paladine appeared in the form of Fizban, a befuddled old wizard. He is still known by that name to the kender of Krynn. Paladine is the patron of the Knights of Solamnia, particularly the Order of the Rose, and the Knights still honor him in their rituals.

Priests of Paladine work to further the cause of goodness and law. Like their god, they prefer to lead by example rather than by force. They know that evil eventually destroys itself, provided it can be held at bay long enough. Paladine's priests serve in temples offering shelter, charity, and healing in times of peace. In times of war, priests fight to protect their charges from harm, provide inspiration and spiritual leadership, and offer their magic to help the injured and the dying. Many priests of Paladine travel, preaching to keep faith in the gods alive and fighting against the forces of evil.

Mishakal, the Healing Hand

Portfolio: Healing, knowledge, fertility, life, beauty, blessing
Aliases: Ka-Mel-Sha, the Healer in the Home (Kharolis/Tarsis), Mesalax (Thorbardin), Meshal (Icewall), Mishas (Ergoth), Quenesti Pah (Silvanesti), Quen Illumini (Qualinesti), Skymistress (Goodlund), the Blue Lady (Balifor, Hylo), Empress (Mithas), Bearer of Light, the Light Bringer (Solamnia)
Symbol: Blue infinity symbol
Worshiper's Alignment: Lawful good, chaotic good
Clergy's Alignment: Lawful good, chaotic good
Weapons: Nonpiercing weapons only
Armor: Any
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Charm, Creation, Divination, Healing, Necromantic, Numbers, Sun, Thought
Minor Spheres: Guardian, Travelers, Wards, plus *prayer* and *remove curse*
Required Proficiencies: Healing
Bonus Proficiencies: The Healing proficiency requires only one slot for a priest of Mishakal.

Mishakal, wife of Paladine, is known throughout Krynn as a goddess of healing and compassion. She is also known as "the Light Bringer" because it was Mishakal who first led mortals to knowledge of the true gods following

SAGA Mystic Spheres: Good

The spheres learned by mystic priests of the true gods are often (but not always) focused on the areas ruled by their deity. Some priests have slightly different sets of spheres, reflecting their personal interpretation of their deity. In the Fifth Age, belief often dictates the nature of mysticism.

Paladine: Channeling, Healing, Spiritualism
Mishakal: Healing, Mentalism, Sensitivity
Majere: Animism, Meditation, Mentalism
Kiri-Jolith: Channeling, Healing, Sensitivity
Habbakuk: Alteration, Animism, Sensitivity
Branchala: Animism, Healing, Sensitivity

the first Cataclysm. The legendary Disks of Mishakal, platinum disks engraved with tales of the Gods of Good, brought this revelation to the people of Krynn.

Mishakal was one of the most popular gods in the years following the War of the Lance. Her priests tended to people all across Ansalon. Following the Second Cataclysm, Mishakal's priest, Goldmoon, discovered the art of mysticism, much in the same way that she discovered the Disks of Mishakal in the ruins of Xak Tsaroth. Many still honor Mishakal for her healing and compassion.

Priests of Mishakal find their vocation as healers, giving comfort to those in need. Though many of them charge a nominal fee for their services, they never overcharge or withhold healing from those who cannot afford it. Temples of Mishakal are known as places of healing and succor, and traveling priests offer their healing aid to those in need. Priests of Mishakal are devoted to spreading the faith of the true gods to the people, reminding them that the gods have not forsaken those who do not forsake them.

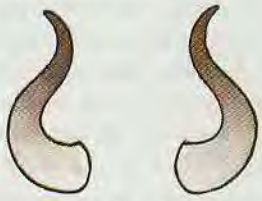
The gods have not forsaken those who do not forsake them.

Majere, Master of Mind

Portfolio: Control, organization, thought, industry, inspiration, dreams
Aliases: Manthus (Ergoth), Mantis of the Rose (Qualinesti), Matheri (Silvanesti), Nadir the Dreamsender (Mithas).
Symbol: Copper spider, single rose (Qualinesti, Silvanesti), mantis (Solamnia)
Worshiper's Alignment: Any good
Clergy's Alignment: Any good
Weapons: Staff, club, bo stick, sling
Armor: Any
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Charm, Divination, Law, Summoning, Thought
Minor Spheres: Animal, Sun, Time, Wards, plus *silence 15' radius, giant insect,* and *insect plague.*
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Wise Majere invented all disciplines that lead to self-realization, including meditation and the martial arts. He also aided in creating and populating Krynn. Insects are considered his special creations, particularly the mantis, one of his symbols. People still honor Majere on Krynn, but some offer no more than lip-service to his ways. Those who respect industry and hard work hold Majere's values in their hearts, but many do not understand the lofty ideals of this god.

Majere's priests, on the other hand, are many. Mystics are drawn to the quiet, introspective ways of Majere, and many of his teachings and techniques from before the Second Cataclysm are used by mystics to master their abilities. Priests of Majere lead simple lives, uncomplicated by material possessions. They promote faith and mercy through example, working to rekindle the spark of faith deep inside the spirits of others. Priests of Majere travel across Ansalon, teaching the disciplines of their faith to others in order to aid them in achieving personal excellence. Although they appear as poor, humble travelers, such priests are usually quite capable of defending themselves.



Kiri-Jolith, Sword of Justice

Portfolio: War, glory, honor, justice, courage
Aliases: Corij (Ergoth), Kijo the Blade (Thorbardin), Jolith (Kharolis/Tasis) Qu'ran the Warrior (Uigan), Emperor (Mithas)
Symbol: Bison's horns, horned battle-ax (Thorbardin, Kharolis)
Worshiper's Alignment: Lawful good
Clergy's Alignment: Lawful good
Weapons: Any
Armor: Any
Major Spheres: All, Combat, Guardian, Healing, Law, Protection, War
Minor Spheres: Charm, Divination, Sun, Wards, plus create food and water.
Required Proficiencies: Heraldry
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Kiri-Jolith is the elder twin son of Paladine and Mishakal. The twins and their father appeared to Vinas Solamnus and inspired him to form the Knights of Solamnia. Stories about Kiri-Jolith tell of his fierce devotion to justice and his skill as a warrior.

Warriors and knights honor Kiri-Jolith, particularly the Knights of Solamnia. He is the patron of the Order of the Sword, invoked in their rites and rituals. Tales of the god's honor and righteousness still form an ideal toward which others aspire.

Mystics drawn to Kiri-Jolith dedicate themselves to fighting against evil in all its forms, particularly evil creatures. They become the defenders of communities or free-lances who travel the land, helping people and communities threat-

ened by the forces of evil. They are honorable and just fighters, willing to sacrifice themselves, if need be, for the good of others. Knights of the Sword also dedicate themselves to Kiri-Jolith.

Habbakuk, the Fisher King

Portfolio: Animals, the sea, creation, passion
Aliases: The Blue Phoenix (Ergoth, Silvanesti, Qualinesti), Skylord (Balifor, Goodlund), Sea Lord (Mithas)
Symbol: Blue kingfisher, blue phoenix (Ergoth)
Worshiper's Alignment: Any non-evil
Clergy's Alignment: Any non-evil
Weapons: Nonmetallic only
Armor: Nonmetallic only
Major Spheres: All, Animal, Creation, Divination, Elemental, Travelers
Minor Spheres: Healing, Time, Wards, Weather, plus *detect life* and *locate animals*.
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Kiri-Jolith's twin brother Habbakuk created the creatures of the land and the sea, starting the endless cycle of hunter and prey. He is a symbol of the cycles of nature; fierce as a lion against evil, gentle as a doe when dealing with good.

Habbakuk is the third patron of the Knights of Solamnia, specifically the Order of the Crown, and his kingfisher symbol appears on Solamnic armor and shields. He is also honored by rangers, sailors, and others in harmony with nature.

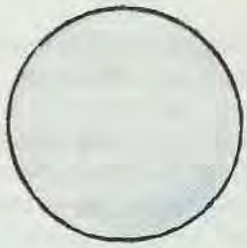
The call of nature is strong to priests of Habbakuk. They do their utmost to protect the natural world from those who would destroy or squander it. Most of these mystics lead simple lives, often as wanderers traveling through the wilderness. They work to balance the needs of the people with preserving the sanctity of nature. Priests and followers of Habbakuk are particularly angered by the control the Dragon Overlords wield over the forces of nature in their domains. Many of them work to preserve the natural order against these changes while some hope to discover a mystic means of reversing them.

Branchala, the Song of Life

Portfolio: Elves, kender, music, forests, beauty
Aliases: Songmaster (Goodlund), Astra (Qualinesti), Astarin (Silvanesti), Bran (Ergoth), Gardener (Mithas), Bardilun (Thorbardin)
Symbol: Bard's harp, flute (Goodlund, Qualinesti, Silvanesti)
Worshiper's Alignment: Any non-evil
Clergy's Alignment: Any non-evil
Weapons: Any
Armor: Any nonmetallic
Major Spheres: All, Creation, Healing, Numbers, Plants, Sun, Weather
Minor Spheres: Animal, Charm, Time, Travelers
Required Proficiencies: One artistic proficiency
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Branchala the Bard King granted Krynn's creatures the music of their spirits at the dawn of creation. Some say that all living hearts beat in time to Branchala's melodies. Before the Second Cataclysm, elves and kender considered Branchala the highest god. In the Fifth Age, many of them still worship Branchala and seek to emulate his love of art. Other artists and lovers of music also find meaning in the worship of this god.

Branchala's priests are artists who seek to create something new. It might be a dance, song, poem, or some other masterpiece. They work to preserve things of great beauty and to inspire others through their own creations. In the Age of Mortals, the power to create is more important than ever, and followers of Branchala want to see that the many artistic gifts given to mortals by the gods are not lost or squandered. They stage festivals and performances to lighten the hearts of the people and expose them to art and beauty.



Solinari, the Mighty Hand

Portfolio: Good magic
Aliases: Solin (Ergoth), White-eye (Goodlund, Balifor), God's Eye (Thorbardin), Ivory Disk (Hylo), Beacon (Mithas)
Symbol: White circle or sphere
Worshiper's Alignment: Any good
Clergy's Alignment: Any good
Weapons: Staff, dagger, darts
Armor: None
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Combat, Divination, Guardian, Healing, Thought
Minor Spheres: Numbers, Protection, Sun, Time
Required Proficiencies: Spellcraft
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Solinari established the Order of the White Robes to administer good magic throughout Ansalon. Magic is Solinari's passion and love, and he delights in studying and using it. Like the other gods of magic, Solinari's departure from Krynn has greatly reduced his cult of worshipers. Some sorcerers still honor Solinari, but his priests are few.

Priests of Solinari devote a great deal of their time to studying mysticism. They are no longer required to be Wizards of the White Robes (since the Orders of High Sorcery no longer exist). Most live solitary lives, although they do sometimes meet to discuss and exchange theories about the new magic of the Fifth Age.

Gods of Evil

Takhisis, Queen of Darkness

Portfolio: Night, evil dragons, intrigue, hatred, chaos
Aliases: Dragon Queen (Ergoth, Silvanesti), Tii'Mhut (Istar), She of the Many Faces (Hylo), Mai-tat (Tarsis), Nilat the Corrupter (Icewall), Tamex the False Metal (Thorbardin), Lady Chaos (Mithas), Darklady (Ogre), Mwarg (Hobgoblin)
Symbol: Black crescent
Worshiper's Alignment: Any evil
Clergy's Alignment: Any evil
Weapons: Any
Armor: Any
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Chaos, Guardian, Protection, Summoning, Time
Minor Spheres: Combat, Creation, Divination, Healing, Necromantic, War, Wards, plus *animate object*
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Even since the departure of the gods, no one on Krynn speaks any of the names of Takhisis lightly. The Queen of Darkness is the ruler of the Gods of Evil and the embodiment of evil itself. Takhisis is responsible for the corruption of the first dragons and for many of the wars that have devastated Ansalon over the ages. She is depicted as a five-headed chromatic dragon or a human or elven temptress of darkling beauty.

Takhisis is the patron goddess of the Knights of Takhisis and is worshiped by many evil humanoids as well. Her knights still seek to conquer all of Krynn for the day when their dark queen returns to rule over it. Priests of Takhisis most commonly appear as Knights of the Skull, powerful members of the Knights of Takhisis. They use their mystical powers to sabotage the works of good and to tempt others into serving them. Skull Knights are known to travel in disguise, seeking out those they can tempt into the service of evil. They plant ideas in the minds of others and recruit for the Knights of Takhisis throughout Ansalon, as well as undermining the work of servants of good.

Sargonnas, Dark Vengeance

Portfolio: Vengeance, destruction, intrigue, volcanoes, fire, deserts
Aliases: Argon (Istar, Ergoth), The Firebringer (Hylo), Misal-Lasim (Tarsis), Gonnas the Willful (Icewall), Sargonax the Bender (Thorbardin), Kinthalas (Silvanesti), Kinis (Qualinesti), Destroyer (Mithas)
Symbol: Red condor, red fist (Thorbardin, Istar)
Worshiper's Alignment: Any evil
Clergy's Alignment: Any evil
Weapons: Any
Armor: Any
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Chaos, Charm, Combat, Creation, Summoning, Sun, Thought
Minor Spheres: Numbers, Protection, War
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Sargonnas is a dark, brooding god. Although he is Takhisis' consort, Sargonnas plots against his queen just as he does against everyone. He has no allies, only enemies and potential enemies.

Sargonnas' cult was always overshadowed by that of Takhisis, and it has remained so since the departure of the gods. He has some following in the more desolate lands of Krynn and among some of the evil humanoid races. Priests of Sargonnas are embittered people who seek vengeance for imagined slights and wish to avenge offenses against Sargonnas (including failure to worship him). They are masters of convoluted plots to further their own goals. Most such priests seek power for their own ends, becoming puppet-masters backing corrupt politicians and leaders who might appear outwardly good and just. They bend and twist laws to suit themselves, creating mazes of intrigue.

Morgion, Black Wind

Portfolio: Disease, decay, plague, weakness, plotting
Aliases: H'rar (Ergoth, Istar), Gormion (Tarsis), Morgi (Icewall), Morgax the Rustlord (Thorbardin), Pestilence (Mithas), Anthrax Goat lord (Hobgoblin)
Symbol: Hood with two red eyes, an upside down ax (Thorbardin), a rat's claw (Hylo)
Worshiper's Alignment: Any evil
Clergy's Alignment: Any evil
Weapons: Sap, dagger
Armor: Only armor made by priests of Morgion
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Divination, Healing, Plant, Time
Minor Spheres: Necromantic, Numbers, Thought
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Morgion is the foul god of disease and decay, a loner even among the Gods of Evil. He is usually depicted as a rotting humanoid corpse with a goat's head, dwelling in his isolated tower of bronze. Secrecy is Morgion's way. All pestilence and disease flows from his touch, and Morgion hates all living things.

They use their mystical powers to sabotage the works of good.

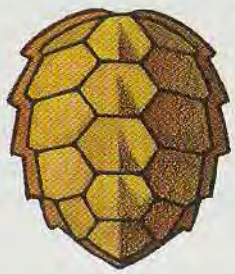
Priests of Morgion meet in secret, dark places under the earth. They use the powers of mysticism and their knowledge of disease to spread plagues among their enemies, creating suffering and death in hopes of improving their own lot or attracting the attention of their absent god. A cult might, for example, deliberately spread plague infested rats or other animals through a community, then take advantage of the chaos caused by the plague to seize control of the area, perhaps even offering to help cure the plague in exchange. Or they might simply allow the plague to rage unchecked, hoping such mass death might bring Morgion back to Krynn.

Chemosh, Lord of Death

Portfolio: Nemesis, ravager, undead
Aliases: Aeleth(Ergoth), Dron of the Deep (Tarsis), Chemos Joton (Icewall), Khemax (Thorbardin), Lifebane (Mithas), Orkrust (Hobgoblin)
Symbol: Yellow skull
Worshiper's Alignment: Any evil
Clergy's Alignment: Any evil
Weapons: Sickle
Armor: Any
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Combat, Necromantic, Thought
Minor Spheres: Healing (usually reversed), Plant, Time, War
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Chemosh is one of Takhisis' lieutenants. He oversaw the creation of the undead and granted the secrets of necromancy to the races of Krynn. Chemosh offers false promises of "eternal life" through the process of becoming undead. He is worshiped by those who fear death or seek power over the undead.

The priests of Chemosh are masters of necromancy and in the creation of undead. They believe that every undead created adds to Chemosh's power. Many believe that, when Krynn is a rotting world of the living dead, Chemosh will return to rule over all and grant power to his most faithful. Priests of Chemosh haunt graveyards, stealing corpses to turn them into the living dead. They're also not averse to creating new corpses personally, killing travelers or other people who they think will not be missed. Some of the most powerful priests try to become vampires and liches themselves in attempting to gain some of Chemosh's own power.



Zeboim, the Darkling Sea

Portfolio: Sea, storms, tempests, jealousy, weather, undead sea races
Aliases: Rann (Ergoth), Zyr (Tarsis), Zebir Jotun (Icewall), Bhezomiax (Thorbardin), Maelstrom (Mithas)
Symbol: Turtle shell pattern
Worshiper's Alignment: Any evil, or sailors of any alignment
Clergy's Alignment: Any evil
Weapons: Trident, harpoon, dagger
Armor: None
Major Spheres: All, Animal, Chaos, Creation, Elemental, Sun, Weather
Minor Spheres: Protection, Time, War, plus *create food and water* and *animate dead*
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: Swimming, Weather Sense

Zeboim is the impetuous daughter of Takhisis and Sargonnas. She is the dark mistress of the sea and the creatures that dwell in the deep. Sailors pray to her to stave off her wrath, which comes in the form of storms and high waves that can swamp boats and drag them to the bottom. Since they neither acknowledge nor worship her, Zeboim has cursed dwarves with their poor luck as sailors.

Zeboim has few priests, but those she has are devout worshipers of the dark power of the sea. Her priests live on or near the sea, particularly as pirates and marauders. They use the power of the sea to steal and plunder as they wish, while doing all in their power to be spared the sea's wrath in return.

Hiddukel, Prince of Lies

Portfolio: Evil business practices, damned spirits, lies, ill-gotten wealth, broken promises, betrayals
Aliases: Betrayer (Mithas), Usk-Do (Hobgoblin), Hitax the Flaw (Thorbardin), M'Fistos (Istar)

SAGA Mystic Spheres: Evil

The following spheres are common for mystics who are priests of the gods of evil in the DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE game. At the GM's discretion, some priests might have different spheres, depending on the priest's background and personality.

Takhisis: Healing, Mentalism, Necromancy
Sargonnas: Alteration, Mentalism, Spiritualism
Morgion: Healing, Sensitivity, Spiritualism
Chemosh: Animism, Necromancy, Spiritualism
Zeboim: Animism, Channeling, Meditation
Hiddukel: Alteration, Necromancy, Spiritualism

Many believe that, when Krynn is a rotting world of the living dead, Chemosh will return to rule.

The Holy Orders of the Stars

The Holy Orders of the Stars are the various faiths that worship the true gods of Krynn. Like the gods themselves, the Orders are arranged into three: good, evil and neutral. Each order has its own organization and hierarchy and each recognizes the power and authority of the other orders. Every true priest on Krynn is a member of one of the Holy Orders.

The departure of the gods from Krynn weakened the power of the Holy Orders; the constellations of the gods are no longer seen in the night sky, nor are the three moons. Still, the orders have persevered in their faith and continue on despite the absence of the gods themselves. Each order works to further its particular faith, and all the orders work to keep belief in the gods alive among the people of Krynn, either because they believe the gods will one day return or because they believe that no people can survive without faith in something greater than themselves.

Each order is led by a single individual, the high priest or priestess of the most powerful deity of that order, advised by the highest ranking priests of the other six deities of the order. The order of good is led by the Chosen Prophet, who is the highest ranking priest of Paladine, advised by six Prophets, who are priests of the other Gods of Good. The Order of Evil is led by a Nightlord, the high priest of Takhisis, and six Nightmasters, priests of the other Gods of Evil. The Order of Neutrality is led by a Starmaster, the high priest of Gilean, and advised by six Archmasters, high priests of the other Gods of Neutrality.

For the most part, the three orders do not cooperate with each other. The Order of Neutrality sometimes allies itself with either of the other two orders to help maintain a balance between them. The Orders of Good and Evil are strongly opposed and work against each other's goals constantly.

Anyone wishing to join one of the Holy Orders must make an application to a priest of that order of 5th level or greater. The aspirant undergoes training and testing as the priest and his order sees fit. Would-be priests of the good gods can learn from any priest of the order of good, since they cooperate with each other. Aspirants to the other orders must apprentice themselves to a priest of their chosen god, since the other cults (particularly those of the order of evil) often compete. Training for good and neutral priests usually involves instruction in religious history and beliefs, along with tests of faith and purity. Training for evil priests is similar, but usually involves brutal initiation rites and deadly tests, along with oaths of undying loyalty.

Symbol: Broken scales
Worshiper's Alignment: Any evil
Clergy's Alignment: Any evil
Weapons: Any blunt
Armor: Any
Major Spheres: All, Chaos, Guardian, Necromancy, Summoning
Minor Spheres: Divination, Protection, Travelers
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Hiddukel is the patron of cheaters, thieves, dishonest merchants and all who make their living through deception. He is opposed to the industry of the neutral gods Shinare and Reorx. Those who heed the siren call of avarice ask Hiddukel to aid them in achieving what they desire, usually at someone else's expense.

Hiddukel's priests are completely self-serving (even moreso than other evil priests). They pursue wealth and power for themselves at the expense of everything (and everyone) else. Such priests often disguise their intentions behind a pleasant and deceptively good-natured front, posing as wealthy merchants or philanthropists. For example, some priests of Hiddukel are known for promising to magically aid villages within the bounds of the Dragon Domains, whose climate has changed so greatly that the people are starving. The people pay for the priest to bring rain or other relief from the weather, then the priest absconds with their money, leaving them nothing.

They pursue wealth and power at the expense of everything [and everyone] else.

Nuitari, the Devouring Dark

Portfolio: Evil magic
Aliases: Nightreaver (Mithas), Darkness (Elian), Black Hand (Balifor), Ungod (Thorbardin)
Symbol: Black circle or sphere
Worshiper's Alignment: Any Evil
Clergy's Alignment: Any Evil
Weapons: Staff, dagger, darts
Armor: None
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Combat, Divination, Guardian, Healing, Numbers, Thought
Minor Spheres: Necromantic, Protection, Time, Weather
Required Proficiencies: Spellcraft
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Nuitari, god of evil magic, is a destroyer and deceiver. He was the patron of the Order of the Black Robes and the source of all evil sorcery on Krynn. Never possessed of many worshipers, Nuitari's cult has all but vanished along with the black moon itself. Some evil sorcerers still invoke his name, but his priests are exceedingly few.

Nuitari's priests seek to understand the source of mysticism in order to corrupt and master it for themselves, denying its power to other mystics. Their power comes from the corrupt depths of the black hearts. Such mystics are rare, but they are often powerful masters of magic.

Gods of Neutrality

Gilean, the Void

Portfolio: Knowledge
Aliases: Gilean the Book, Gray Voyager, the Sage, the Gate of Souls
Symbol: Open book
Worshiper's Alignment: Any
Clergy's Alignment: Any neutral
Weapons: Staff
Armor: Any
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Creation, Divination, Healing, Numbers, Protection, Time
Minor Spheres: Animal, Charm, Combat, Sun, Thought, Wards
Required Proficiencies: Reading/Writing
Bonus Proficiencies: Priests of Gilean gain one additional priest nonweapon proficiency per level.

Gilean was once a mortal sage so meticulous as to have never penned a single mistake. He was chosen by the High God to be the guardian and keeper of the Tobril, the book containing the High God's plan and the whole universe. Gilean was faithful in guarding the knowledge, which some say foretold the return of Chaos.

Gilean is honored by all seekers of truth, especially scribes and sages. He was never greatly loved by the general populace, even before the Fifth Age. Still, there are many keepers of knowledge on Ansalon who revere Gilean.

Priests of Gilean are invariably scholars, scribes, teachers, or other seekers and guardians of knowledge. They tend to live ascetic lives, poring over ancient books and manuscripts and writing their histories and theories for posterity. Priests of Gilean, however, are leaving their temples and libraries to travel the land, gathering lore to preserve for the generations to come. Bards and heralds honor Gilean's name, and many folk believe that the Herald, the legendary storyteller of Ansalon, might in fact be an avatar of Gilean or of the Tobril itself.

Sirrion, the Flowing Flame

Portfolio: Flame, change, transformation, alchemy, natural power
Aliases: Firemaster, the Alchemist, the Wizard (Mithas)
Symbol: Multi-colored flame
Worshiper's Alignment: Any
Clergy's Alignment: Any neutral
Weapons: Any
Armor: Any
Major Spheres: All, Chaos, Combat, Elemental (heat and fire spells only), Guardian, Healing, Summoning
Minor Spheres: Numbers, Sun
Required Proficiencies: Fire-building
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Sirrion is the god of fire in all its forms, from the tool and friend of mortals to the raging power of the forest fire, clearing away deadwood and making way for new growth. His power is both creative and destructive, but even in destruction he brings about the promise of something new. Sirrion is associated with those who make considerable use of flame, like alchemists and tinker gnomes. His wife is Shinare, the goddess of wealth and commerce.

Sirrion had few followers even before the Fifth Age. Those who are drawn to the beauty and power of fire revere him, and they seek to make fire a useful and powerful tool. Priests of Sirrion use fire to create things of beauty and to aid the cause of nature, while containing some of fire's more destructive and dangerous aspects. Most of them tend to be passionate artists who become wrapped up in their work. They often cooperate with priests of Branchala in supporting the arts, although the priests of Sirrion prefer the art of smithwork, glassblowing, alchemy, and other crafts involving fire.

SAGA Mystic Spheres: Neutral

The spheres learned by mystic priests of the true gods are often (but not always) focused on the areas ruled by their deity, as given below. Some priests have slightly different sets of spheres, reflecting their personal interpretation of their deity.

Gilean: Meditation, Mentalism, Sensitivity
Sirrion: Alteration, Healing, Mentalism. Mystics of Sirrion are also often sorcerers able to use the Pyromancy school.
Reorx: Channeling, Healing, Sensitivity. Mystics of Reorx are also often sorcerers able to use the Geomancy school.
Chislev: Alteration, Animism, Healing
Zivilyn: Meditation, Sensitivity, Spiritualism
Shinare: Channeling, Healing, Mentalism

Reorx, the Forge

Portfolio: Dwarves, smithwork, weapons, technology
Aliases: Anvil (Elian), the Weapon master (Mithas), Reorx the Master (Gnomes), Reorx the Craftsman (Kender)
Symbol: Hammer
Worshiper's Alignment: Any
Clergy's Alignment: Any neutral
Weapons: Hammer, battle-ax, hand-ax.
Armor: Only metal armor
Major Spheres: All, Combat, Creation, Elemental, Guardian, Law, Protection, Sun, War
Minor Spheres: Healing, Summoning, Thought, Wards
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: Any one craft proficiency

The dwarves of Ansalon all consider Reorx to be the greatest of the gods. Reorx created the world of Krynn out of Chaos on his forge, while his other creation—the Graygem of Gargath—created dwarves, gnomes, and kender.

SAGA Role: The Heathen Druid

ROLEPLAYING: Druids are guardians of nature. They revere the natural cycles of the sun, the moon, and the seasons, as well as all natural creatures. While many druids pay respects to nature gods like Chislev and Habbakuk, it is nature itself that they worship. Most druids disdain civilization, living in isolated wilderness locations far from human habitation.

REQUIREMENTS: To be a druid, a hero must have at score of at least 6 in Spirit and at code of at least "B." A druid hero must know the mystic sphere of Animism. Druids with an "A" code in spirit can learn other spheres, and Alteration and Healing are common. Druids cannot have a code greater than "C" in Endurance, since they rarely wear heavy metallic armor. Druids cannot have a score greater than 6 in Reason, because they rarely deal with civilized, educated society. Druids can be of any race, although humans druids are by far the most common.

ADVANTAGES: Druids have a strong empathy for the natural world, and gain an automatic trump bonus when casting spells using the Animism sphere of mysticism.

DISADVANTAGES: Druids are not practiced in the social graces of "civilized" folk. No card played by a druid is considered trump for Presence actions when dealing with civilized humans and similar people.

Dwarves remained faithful to Reorx throughout the upheavals of the First Cataclysm and the dark years that followed. They remain the god's most numerous followers since the Chaos War and many dwarves still revere the forge god, although some have faltered in their faith. Reorx was never popular with humans, who see him as the comical dwarven squire of Kiri-Jolith. In the Fifth Age, worship of Reorx is limited mostly to the demihuman races.

Priests of Reorx are almost invariably dwarves, although a few gnomes and even kender are called to the forge god's service. Priests of Reorx must be craftsmen of some kind, and each works to create a masterpiece of his or her craft as a tribute to the god.

Chislev, the Beast

Portfolio: Nature, wilds, beasts
Aliases: Wild One (Mithas), the Wilds
Symbol: A feather of brown, yellow, and green
Worshiper's Alignment: Any non-evil
Clergy's Alignment: Neutral
Weapons: Sling, club, sickle, dart, spear, dagger, scimitar
Armor: Any nonmetallic
Major Spheres: All, Animal, Elemental, Healing, Plants, Sun, Weather,Time
Minor Spheres: Chaos, Charm, Combat, Guardian
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Chislev is nature incarnate. She is the land, the waters, and the seasons of the year. The seasons represent her feelings: Her fear brings on autumn, her despair is winter, her hope brings the spring, and her joy is summer. The animals and plants of Krynn pay her homage. Chislev's mate is Zivilyn. She opposes the industry of Shinare, because it often comes at the expense of nature.

Chislev is most beloved by the elves of Krynn, who worship nature in all her aspects. All others who honor nature give some recognition to Chislev. Her true worshipers say her presence can be felt in every leaf and blade of grass.

Priests of Chislev are strongly nature-oriented. They work to protect and restore natural beauty wherever they can, healing the scars of the land inflicted by war. They oppose taking more from nature than is needed, such as clear-cutting forests or strip-mining. They are strongly opposed to the changes caused by the Dragon Overlords, who warped and twisted the landscape to suit themselves.

Zivilyn, the Tree of Life

Portfolio: Wisdom
Aliases: World Tree, Tree of Life (Qualinesti, Silvanesti), Wise One (Mithas)
Symbol: A green or gold tree, sometimes a vallenwood

Worshiper's Alignment: Any
Clergy's Alignment: Any
Weapons: Staff
Armor: None
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Divination, Necromantic, Plant, Thought
Minor Spheres: Numbers
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Zivilyn is the celestial Tree of Life at the center of all things, whose branches and roots extend into all places and times. As Gilean is keeper of all knowledge, Zivilyn is keeper of all wisdom. His mate is Chislev and together they form a perfect balance of harmony and understanding.

Zivilyn is worshiped by all those who seek deep wisdom and understanding, particularly by many elves. Many find his way difficult, and worship of Zivilyn has fallen off in the Fifth Age (a great concern for the wisdom of the Age, say his worshipers). Priests of Zivilyn tend to be quiet and contemplative. They devote themselves to seeking wisdom in thought and deed, and they are among the most passionate seekers of new lore and learning about mysticism. They try to teach wisdom to others by example.

Shinare, Winged Victory

Portfolio: Wealth, industry, freedom, commerce, power
Aliases: Winged One (Silvanesti, Qualinesti), Silver Master (Thorbardin), Walking Liberty (Ergoth), Balance or the Scales (Mithas)
Symbol: Griffin's wing

Worshiper's Alignment: Any
Clergy's Alignment: Any
Weapons: Mace
Armor: Only armor made by priests of Shinare
Major Spheres: All, Charm, Creation, Guardian, Protection, Travelers
Minor Spheres: Combat, Law, Sun
Required Proficiencies: None
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Shinare has many dwarven worshipers, and merchants, mercenaries, and profit-minded folks of all races offer up prayers to her. Shinare is considered the patron of freedom and self-determination. Her companion is Sirrion, the god of creative fire. Although opposites in many ways, the two complement each other: Sirrion temperamental and artistic, Shinare calm and pragmatic.

Shinare's followers are all those who seek to improve their lot through hard work, cleverness, and industry. These values appeal to the people of Krynn, who have suffered through so much since the Second Cataclysm. They hold up Shinare's ways as a sign of hope for building a better future.

Priests of Shinare are hard workers. They seek to create something worthwhile and lasting, while improving their own situation and that of their family, friends, and community. Unlike the priests of the previous age, mystics of Shinare rarely flaunt their wealth with expensive clothing and jewelry, preferring instead to demonstrate their personal wealth through acts of charity and generosity. They are gracious hosts and good friends.

Lunitari, Veiled Maiden

Portfolio: Neutral magic, illusions
Aliases: Luin (Ergoth), Red-Eye (Goodlund), Night Candle (Thor bardin), Maid of Illusion (Mithas)
Symbol: Red circle or sphere
Worshiper's Alignment: Any neutral
Clergy's Alignment: Any neutral
Weapons: Staff, dagger, darts
Armor: None
Major Spheres: All, Astral, Combat, Divination, Guardian, Healing, Numbers, Thought
Minor Spheres: Charm, Summoning, Time
Required Proficiencies: Spellcraft
Bonus Proficiencies: None

Lunitari is the daughter of Gilean and the former patron of the Order of the Red Robes, the goddess of neutral magic. Since the departure of the gods and the end of the Orders of High Sorcery, worship of Lunitari has fallen off considerably. Her few priests are loners seeking to understand the nature of mysticism, free from the moral shackles and imperatives of other priests. She is also honored by neutral wizards and former members of the Order of the Red Robes.

A freelance writer for RPG's, Steve Kenson still recalls telling friends in high school about the "cool new module" for D&D called DRAGONLANCE saga. He always liked to play clerics, and he still thinks Krynn's pantheon is one of the best.

The Gods of Magic

Three gods are even less evident on Krynn than the others, the gods of magic: Solinari, Lunitari, and Nuitari. In previous Ages, these gods were associated with the three moons of Krynn. They granted the secrets of High Sorcery to mortals and unleashed wild magic in Krynn through the Graygem of Gargath.

The departure of the gods of magic following the Chaos War resulted not only in a loss of power to their priests and the replacement of the three moons with a single new moon but also the loss of High Sorcery on Krynn. The wizards of Krynn have since discovered new powers of sorcery that do not come from the gods and have for the most part abandoned worship of the absent gods of magic. Likewise, their priesthood has been largely depopulated. Some mystics still follow the gods of magic, but they are few.

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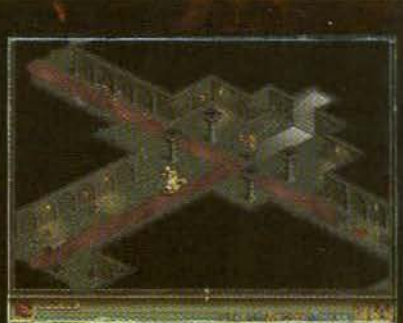

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They Came From Outer Space

The "A-Team," as they like to be called, made 1999 a very good year for the ALTERNITY game.

In June, Bruce Cordell's *Tangents* sourcebook made it possible for ALTERNITY campaigns to take place anytime, anywhere. With the September release of the inexpensive introductory ALTERNITY Adventure game by the triple-threat team of Bill Slavicsek, Bill Connors, and Sean Reynolds, the game reaches out to more players than ever. JD Wiker's *Mindwalkers* closed the year by exploring one of the most fascinating concepts in science fiction: psionic powers.

The STAR*DRIVE® setting saw enormous growth this year, with novels, adventures, and sourcebooks. Chris Perkins's *Planet of Darkness* and Bill Slavicsek's *Threats from Beyond* provided lots of adventure for STAR*DRIVE players. Bringing the books and games together was *STAR COMPENDIUM™: Systems of the Verge.*

Perhaps the biggest event of 1999 was the launch of the DARK•MATTER™ campaign setting, by Wolfgang Baur with Monte Cook. Rich Baker, Creative Director of the A-Team, describes the setting as "a little bit of science horror, a little bit of conspiracy theory, and a little bit of sheer terror all rolled up into one incredible package." ALTERNITY Brand Manager Jim Butler concurs, praising the book for "fantastic art and subject matter that TSR has never touched before."

Year 2000 Preview

Next year, Sean Reynolds will expand the world of FX powers for the ALTERNITY game in ***Beyond Science: A Guide to FX.*** In addition, look for a setting based on the real-time strategy sensation *Starcraft.*

For the STAR*DRIVE setting, the next year's products include a 96-page guide to the Aegis system. It will include, according to Jim Butler, "all the plots and schemes bubbling at the center of the Verge." Add to this an ***ALIEN COMPENDIUM™ II***, and the campaign will be vast enough for even the most far-ranging heroes. Rich warns us that 1999's adventures set the stage for "the greatest threat to the Verge since the Second Galactic War."

For the DARK•MATTER campaign, look for ***The Killing Jar***, an extra-creepy adventure by Bruce Cordell. If they're still alive and kicking by spring, let them face the terrors of ***The Final Church***, "a sourcebook and adventure confronting one of the nastiest conspiracies of the setting," according to Rich. He promises, "It'll keep you up at nights."

If you haven't played the ALTERNITY game yet, now's the perfect time. There are three ways to check it out:

1. Read the Fast-Play rules in this very issue, then run the sample adventure for your friends.
2. For an even quicker excursion into the dark corners of the world, try "***The Voice***," a simplified solo adventure in *DRAGON Magazine* #265, on sale now.
3. Once you've mastered the basics, buy the ***ALTERNITY Player's Handbook***, ***Gamemaster's Guide***, and the DARK•MATTER Setting. Your first full-length adventure, ***The Kindness of Strangers***, awaits you in the following pages.

Big ALTERNITY News

Price Reduction: As of September 1, the prices on the *Player's Handbook* and *Gamemaster Guide* were reduced to $19.95, making your first foray into science-fiction roleplaying easier than ever.

Electronic Releases: ***Murder in Drivespace*** will be the first electronic release for the ***ALTERNITY*** game. You can download this file for much less than you'd be able to purchase it in a retail store. And it'll never be out of stock!

More releases will have electronic components or be released as downloads. ***The Killing Jar***, for instance, will be a printed product that has additional information online that builds on the material already presented. Other products will appear only online, so keep an eye on www.wizards.com.

Dungeon

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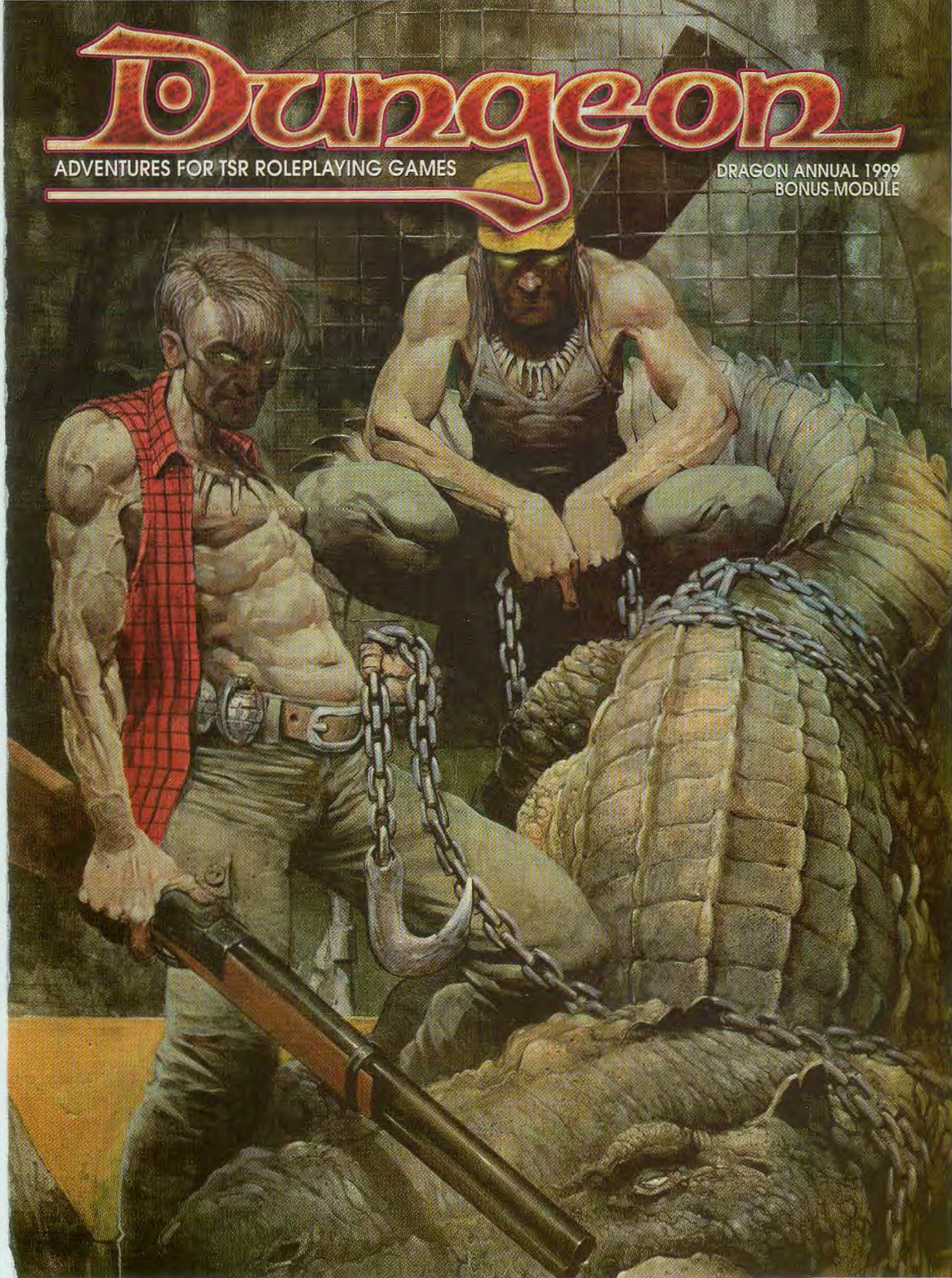


"This swamp has some huge mosquitos!"

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

BY CHRISTOPHER PERKINS

Deliverance from evil

Artwork by Carl Critchlow
Cartography by Diesel

This adventure was clearly inspired by the film Deliverance *and too many episodes of* The X-Files. *The adventure works best with eerie music playing in the background, maybe even a little banjo music.*

"The Kindness of Strangers" is an adventure designed for the ALTERNITY® Science Fiction Roleplaying Game and set in the DARK•MATTER™ Campaign Setting. The adventure is best played with 4–8 heroes of beginning levels. All heroes must be human, although a combination of professions (Combat Spec, Diplomat, Free Agent, Tech Op) is suggested, with at least one hero possessing mindwalking skills. The adventure assumes that the heroes are either field agents of the Hoffmann Institute or freelancers hired by the Institute.

Several of the careers presented in the "Heroes" chapter of the DARK•MATTER Campaign Setting are appropriate for this mission. Suggested careers include the soldier of fortune (for Combat Specs), the dilettante and military officer (for Diplomats), the field agent and psi agent (for Free Agents), and the field guide and hacker (for Tech Ops).

The Hoffmann Institute

The Hoffmann Institute, formed in 1917, is an organization dedicated to investigating the paranormal, including aliens, arcane magic, and secret societies. The Institute is aware of several extraterrestrial species with earthbound agendas but has no reliable contact with most of them. The Institute also shares a common vision with the United Nations as a defender against extraterrestrial threats. However, the Institute is autonomous, answering only to its Board of Directors.

The Institute tries to keep its agents well informed, but for every secret revealed there are many more hidden. In general, agents are given just enough information to complete their assignments. Given the nature of their work, however, many agents uncover truths beyond what they were meant to learn.

For more information on the Institute and its divisions, refer to the "Secret History" and "The Institute" chapters of the DARK•MATTER Campaign Setting.

The Vanishing Scientist

Two years ago, the Hoffmann Institute hired Veña Sanchevandez, an American (Bolivian-born) scientist, to develop treatments for patients suffering from severe radiation exposure. Professor Sanchevandez was moved to Chicago, given a laboratory, and assigned a preselected research staff. Her endeavors were closely monitored by the Institute's Intelligence Division, and her reports were classified. She quickly became aware of an impetus for results.

Professor Sanchevandez's research was not advancing quickly enough for her superiors. Aware of the Intelligence Division's growing impatience, she began corresponding with Professor Eriq Ricardo, a luminary radiation specialist and colleague residing in Albuquerque, New Mexico. However, efforts to bring Ricardo "into the fold" were thwarted by his mysterious disappearance. Several weeks later, Sanchevandez received a cryptic letter from Professor Ricardo asking her to meet him in Venezuela, where he had found something pertinent to their research.

Sanchevandez informed her superiors of Ricardo's letter. Determined to uncover Ricardo's secret without arousing his suspicion, the Institute fabricated a cover story for Sanchevandez, making it seem as though she were returning to Bolivia to attend her father's funeral. Upon arriving in Bolivia, Sanchevandez chartered a private flight to Caracas to meet Ricardo secretly.

Shortly after her arrival, Professor Sanchevandez was identified and taken to a remote factory in the hills outside Caracas by a group of strange men (called sandmen) working for an etoile, an intelligent xenoform resembling a tangled mesh of living wires.

The sandmen brought Sanchevandez and Ricardo together and put them to work enhancing a cyberorganic implant designed to render its host impervious to various forms of radiation. Created by the etoile to protect the sandmen from radiation, the symbiotic implant resembles a small but peculiar conglomeration of wires and alloys. It attaches to its host's spine by digging its tendrils through the host's lower back.

Three Institute operatives assigned to shadow Sanchevandez broke into the etoile's secret facility, killing several of the sandmen before freeing the captured scientists. However, during their escape, the shadow operatives were killed by various security systems. Ricardo and Sanchevandez fled the complex but were hunted down by the etoile's remaining sandmen. Ricardo was exterminated, but not before giving the anti-radiation implant to Professor Sanchevandez and delaying the sandmen long enough for her to escape.

Sanchevandez immediately alerted the Hoffmann Institute and went into hiding. Once apprised of the situation, the Institute made preparations to remove Sanchevandez and the implant from Caracas and return them safely to the United States.

To conceal the true nature of the implant, the Intelligence Division (working with the "special ops" division of Blue Section) has devised a false cover story suggesting that Sanchevandez took advantage of an opportunity to sell her research to a South American company for profit, portraying her as a rogue Intelligence operative. The Division has selected a group of field agents to travel to Caracas and escort Sanchevandez to Washington D.C. for "questioning." The agents are told nothing of the implant, the etoile, the sandmen, or Professor's Sanchevandez's true loyalty to the Hoffmann Institute.

Mission Set-up

The adventure assumes that the heroes have already arrived in Caracas, made contact with Professor Sanchevandez, and escorted her safely to a secret airfield outside the city (thus avoiding airport security and metal detectors). The adventure begins aboard a Hoffmann Institute jet equipped with state-of-the-art technology and an ablative fuselage that renders it invisible to radar. The trip from Venezuela to the Institute's private landing strip outside of Washington D.C. is expected to take 3 hours.

Having narrowly escaped extermination by the Institute's shadow agents, the etoile has already relocated its base of operations. It employs its international network of sandmen to track the stolen radiation implant in Sanchevandez's possession. Unable to detect the plane, they manage to home in on a small yet powerful alien transmitter built into the implant itself.

The sandmen do what they must to keep the etoile's technology from falling into enemy hands. Commandeering an American government satellite, sandmen hackers use an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) to disable the Hoffmann jet in midflight, 10 kilometers above the Carribean Sea and 75 kilometers from the Florida panhandle. The pulse fries the plane's communication and navigation systems, polarizes the aircraft's compass, knocks out the engines, and kills the pilot and co-pilot. The EMP also disables the heroes' cellular phones, computers, comm gear, and watches.

After a harrowing descent, the heroes land the disabled plane safely and find themselves stranded in a remote Florida bayou with only their gear and wits to help them. Deprived of electronic hardware and communication devices, they must somehow contact the Institute and insure Sanchevandez's safe return to Washington.

Flight 000

The heroes begin the mission with whatever equipment the Gamemaster deems appropriate. Given that their mission is to safely escort Veña Sanchevandez back to the United States, the heroes are probably armed with handguns and spare ammunition. Heavier weaponry should be discouraged.

Heroes can select whatever communication and surveillance gear they like; however, given the "shoot in and out" nature of their assignment, they should be traveling light.

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the adventure:

> Hoffman Institute Flight 000
> June 15, 5:32 P.M.
>
> You left Venezuela just over two hours ago with Professor Sanchevandez in custody. She has not spoken to you since boarding the plane, and from her ghostly pallor you guess that

she doesn't like to travel. The plane is flying in stealth mode, its engines whispering quietly above the clouds, its ablative fuselage deflecting radar signals. The pilot reports that the plane is flying at an altitude of 10 kilometers and is approximately 150 kilometers southwest of the Florida panhandle. At your present speed, the plane should land in Washington D.C. within one hour.

The jet is equipped with all of the amenities: reclining chairs, a private bar, television screens, cellular phones, and laptop computers. You've already informed the Institute of your ETA. A team of agents is waiting for you at Dulles International Airport. They are preparing to debrief Sanchevandez upon her arrival.

You know only that the professor supposedly left the United States to attend her father's funeral in Bolivia. How she ended up in Venezuela is the Institute's concern. From her file, you know that Professor Sanchevandez has been working for the Intelligence Division developing gene therapies to counteract radiation sickness, but there is speculation that she and a colleague were trying to sell their research abroad. According to the Intelligence Division, Sanchevandez's colleague, Professor Eriq Ricardo, was experimenting with radiation treatments at the Institute's Treatment Center in Albuquerque. The two scientists had been corresponding via the Internet and agreed to meet one another in Caracas, where Professor Ricardo had allegedly found some private investors interested in procuring their research.

Your mission isn't to interrogate Professor Sanchevandez. The Institute has made it clear that no one is to question the professor before she is taken into custody by the agents in Washington. You know only that Professor Eriq Ricardo is dead, killed by unknown operatives in Caracas. Sanchevandez has declined to shed light on her colleague's murder.

Heroes might take this opportunity to question Sanchevandez. Although she knows all of the information in "The Vanishing Scientist" section, her superiors in the Intelligence Division have instructed her not to divulge any information about her experience in Caracas or the fate of Professor Ricardo. Any hero making a successful Interaction–*charm* or Interaction–*intimidate* skill check at a +2 step penalty can learn one of the following pieces of information on an Ordinary success, two on a Good success, and three on an Amazing success. Note that the hero must ask the right questions before she provides these answers:

- She did not head to South America to attend her father's funeral. Her father is still alive and living in Bolivia.
- She did not kill Professor Ricardo. The two scientists were friends, and she is saddened by his death.
- She expects to be debriefed by her superiors upon her return to the United States. She plans to tell them everything.
- Ricardo had gone missing. When he finally contacted her and asked her to meet him in Caracas, she agreed. She believed that Ricardo had made a discovery pertinent to their research.
- Before she left the country, she was creating radiation sickness treatments for the Institute. She does not know what the Institute plans to do with her gene therapy research or the treatments.

If the heroes are abusive, Professor Sanchevandez provides them with no pertinent information. She does not defend herself, biding her time until her safe return to Washington, whereupon she reports the heroes' misconduct to her superiors.

The Unfriendly Skies

Once the sandmen home in on the transmitter in Sanchevandez's implant, they commandeer a satellite and use its EMP to disable the plane. Regardless of what the heroes are doing, once the plane is 75 kilometers from the Florida panhandle, read or paraphrase the following:

An intense burst of light engulfs the plane, pouring through the cabin windows. The cabin temperature rises quickly, and you can hear a crackling noise throughout the fuselage. The light vanishes, and through the cabin's windows you can see arcs of electricity on the wings. Suddenly, every computer and cellular phone within the cabin explodes and dies. The plastic casements that line the interior of the plane begin to melt, and smoke pours through seams in the fuselage.

The intense light and crackling noises abate. You can no longer hear the engines hum, and the plane seems to be descending ... rapidly.

Any heroes seated in the cockpit bear witness to the horrible deaths of the pilot and copilot as the EMP sends thousands of amps of current through their bodies. Nothing remains of them except burnt corpses with smoke rising from their eye sockets. The EMP destroys all electronic equipment aboard the aircraft. Cellular phones melt and become useless; laptop computers explode with spectacular sparks. Digital watches are frozen, and all comm gear is rendered useless.

Professor Sanchevandez is unharmed by the EMP. Her implant was designed to withstand electromagnetic pulses and is the only piece of hardware to survive the "attack." (The etoile who created the implant expects it to be destroyed in the plane crash.) The EMP does have one minor residual effect on the implant, leaving the professor feeling ill and weak. Heroes who make a successful Awareness–*perception* check can see that the professor is not well, although they might dismiss this as air sickness.

The powerless jet plummets from the darkening sky. Heroes have 4 rounds of action before the plane crashes, during which time they can attempt any of the following feats:

- **Jump from the plane.** Although the aircraft is equipped with parachutes, the EMP has welded shut all exits. Even if the heroes could "blow" their way out, the sudden depressurization coupled with the plane's rapid descent would likely destroy the plane and kill everyone aboard.
- **Send a distress signal.** The EMP destroys all onboard communication systems. The heroes have no way of communicating with the outside world. Despite the heroes' best attempts, the equipment cannot be repaired. Heroes attempting to do so waste a full round of actions.

Crash land the plane. This would seem to be the only viable option. Although navigation and guidance systems are inoperable (and unrepairable), the plane can be controlled manually with a great deal of effort and luck.

Any hero who takes control of the airplane must make a successful Dexterity feat check at a +3 step penalty or Vehicle Operation–*air* skill check at a +2 step penalty to stabilize the plane's descent. The hero can attempt a new roll during each phase he or she is entitled to an action. If another hero assists by taking over the copilot's position, the penalty is reduced by one step. The roll must succeed before the plane crashes.

A successful check indicates a controlled crash landing. The plane remains largely intact, and injuries are minor. Everyone aboard the aircraft must make a Constitution feat check. Damage from impact varies with the degree of success: no damage on an Amazing success, d4+1s on a Good success, 2d4s on an Ordinary success, d4+1w on a Failure, and d6+1w on a Critical Failure.

A failed Vehicle Operation–*air* skill check indicates an uncontrolled landing. The plane is torn to pieces, leading to severe and possibly fatal injuries. Everyone aboard the plane must make a Constitution feat check. Damage from impact varies with the degree of success: d4w on an Amazing success, d4+1w on a Good success, 2d4w on an Ordinary success, d4m on a Failure, and 2d4m on a Critical Failure.

The Gamemaster should make a Constitution feat check for Professor Sanchevandez, adding a d4 to the control die. If possible, the Gamemaster should ensure that Sanchevandez survives the crash, although she might be injured. She has one Last Resort point that can be used to reduce damage by one degree.

Professor Veña Sanchevandez

Level 6 human female Tech Op

STR	8		INT	13	[+2]
DEX	11	[+1]	WIL	10	
CON	9		PER	9	

Durability: 9/9/5/5 — Action check: 15+/14/7/3
Move: sp 22, ru 14, wa 4, eas 2, sw 4 — # Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2 — Last Resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed*	5/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O

* +d4 base situation die

Defenses

–4 step bonus to CON feat checks vs. poison and radiation (due to implant; see "Equipment" below)

Skills

Athletics [8]; Modern Ranged Weapons [11]–*pistol [12]*; Vehicle Operation [11]; Stamina [9]; Computer Science [13]; Knowledge [13]–*English [15], Spanish [16]*; Life Science [13]–*biology [18], genetics [16], zoology [14]*; Physical Science [13]–*chemistry [17]*; Technical Science [13]; Awareness [10]; Creativity [10]–*academic writing [11]*; Investigate [10]–*research [13]*; Teach [10]; Interaction [9].

Equipment

The professor has an implant attached to the base of her spine. The implant was created by an alien race called the etoile and is composed of extraterrestrial alloys. It is designed to protect the host from poison and intense levels of radiation. The implant is a 10 cm-long, 6 cm-wide metal "slug" with wiry tendrils embedded in the host's flesh. These tendrils are nearly 1 meter long and connected to nerve clusters in the host's body. The implant has many safeguards: Removing it without killing the host requires a Medical Science–*surgery* complex skill check (5 successes).

Background

Veña is a petite woman with brown eyes, curly brown hair, and olive complexion. She was born in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 1969, emigrated to the United States in 1978, and attended the University of Massachusetts in 1982, where she studied chemistry and biology. She has written several papers on biogenetics and is considered an expert in her field. She is currently employed by the Hoffmann Institute, helping to devise radiation treatments.

Down in the Bayou

The plane crashes deep within a Florida bayou. Water can be heard seeping into the plane's cargo hold, but the plane is in no danger of sinking.

If the landing was controlled, both the cockpit and the passenger cabin are intact, although it's clear that the plane cannot be salvaged. Conscious heroes can escape through gashes in the fuselage near the wings and tail.

If the landing was uncontrolled, both wings have been torn from the fuselage, and the main cabin has snapped in two pieces near the tail. Heroes can exit the plane through the shattered fuselage.

The heroes have no way to determine their precise location, and their ability to communicate with the outside world has been lost. Once they abandon the aircraft, read or paraphrase the following:

> You've survived the crash, but the plane's ablative hull makes it unlikely that anyone knows where you are. Your electronic equipment is dead, and there's nothing around except swamp and swarming insects. You've crashed in the middle of nowhere, and night is encroaching.

The heroes can salvage four first aid kits, a rescue pack, a pair of binoculars,

and two toolkits from the airplane. (These items are fully detailed in Chapter 9 of the *Player's Handbook*.) There are also two four-man inflatable rafts, a flare gun, six flares, and a pair of imaging goggles stored in the sunken cargo hold; recovering these items requires a successful Movement–*swim* skill check with a –2 step bonus. All other equipment aboard the plane has been destroyed or rendered inoperable by the EMP.

The sun is just beginning to set, and the heroes have less than an hour before nightfall.

Heroes who explore the area around the plane can make an Awareness–*perception* skill check with a –1 step bonus. Those who succeed quickly realize they are not alone. The lakes and swampy embankments are home to several alligators that watch all interlopers with keen interest. The alligators are slow to attack. Only heroes who stray too far from the airplane are attacked; those who remain inside or near the plane are not bothered for several hours. In the event of an alligator attack, use the "Crocodile" statistics presented in the *Gamemaster Guide* (page 233).

Regardless of whether they choose to remain near the plane or head out in a random direction, the heroes soon encounter more of the local "wildlife." Proceed with the following encounter.

The Swamprat

This encounter takes place in the swamp or near the crashed plane. Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> The noises of the swamp are dulled by a constant drone that grows louder as the seconds pass.
>
> To the west, lit by the dying sun, is a flat-bottomed skiff propelled across the swamp by a huge fan mounted to its stern. Rising from the skiff are four tall, metal struts supporting a chair, upon which sits the driver. At the front of the skiff stands another figure with a rifle tucked under one arm.
>
> The boat swerves around several swampy embankments but is clearly headed in your general direction.

The flat-bottomed skiff, better known as a swamprat, is moving quickly toward the crash site. Heroes can use binoculars to get a closer look at the approaching boat, or they can wait until it draws nearer. Once the boat and its occupants become more visible to the heroes, read or paraphrase the following:

> The two men in the skiff bear more than a passing resemblance to one another. You would guess that they are brothers or perhaps cousins.
>
> The man standing on the bow of the rig looks a few years older than the driver, and his clean-shaven face cannot quite conceal a crooked smile.
>
> The slack-jawed driver pulls back on the throttle, silencing the incessant hum and allowing the skiff to glide to a stop.
>
> The men are dressed in stained fatigues and have guns tucked under their arms. You also notice that both men wear bandoliers, hanging from which are several grenades. Dragging in the water along each side of the skiff is a dead alligator with a steel hook buried deep in its lower jaw.

The man standing on the bow of the swamprat is John Keller. He carries a .44 lever rifle under his arm and has two grenades dangling from his bandolier. The skiff's driver is Thomas Keller, John's younger brother. Thomas has a shotgun tucked under his arm, a .45 revolver holstered to his thigh, and four grenades hanging from his bandolier. The Keller boys are alligator hunters; they use the grenades (and sometimes dynamite) to blast gators out of the water, then use firearms to finish off their stunned prey.

The Keller boys cannot appear to be in their mid to late twenties. (John is 29, and Thomas is 24.) They are simple men with no formal education; they speak slowly and in short sentences, and their words are punctuated with a thick southern drawl.

Any hero who makes a successful Awareness—*perception* check at a +1 step penalty notices something odd about the Kellers. Unlike the heroes, who are constantly pestered by swarms of insects, the Kellers are not. The swarms seem to avoid them. If brought to his attention, John claims, "Must be the gasoline." Indeed, heroes can smell a faint odor of gasoline rising from the skiff; however, the insects' aversion points to something far more sinister.

The Kellers are not entirely human. They are the result of genetic experiments combining human and water moccasin DNA. Their reptilian DNA makes them incredibly strong, devious, and sadistic. They are also extremely cunning, particularly when it comes to setting traps and ambushes.

The Kellers give the heroes hungry looks but offer to take them to their house "just up the river." If the heroes attack them, the Kellers retaliate with all the force they can muster. In melee combat, they rely on their brute strength and venomous fangs to overcome their prey. If they are not provoked, they seem agreeable if peculiar.

Brothers and Arms

John handles most of the speaking, as Thomas doesn't possess much of a vocabulary. If the heroes confront the Kellers in a nonhostile manner, they can glean the following information by asking the proper questions:

- The brothers live in a house on the bayou, several miles west of the crash site. They saw the plane go down from across the bayou and decided to investigate.
- John and Thomas have four more brothers named Bill, Dwight, Jimmy, and Ron respectively. All of them are gator hunters. According to John, the other brothers are "out huntin'." The brothers live alone in the house.
- The brothers have a working radio in their house. They are willing to take the heroes aboard the swamprat, transport them to the house, and let them use the radio to signal for help.
- The Kellers have a truck that they use when "headin' to town." The nearest town is "at least an hour's drive" from the house.
- The Kellers' house does not have a phone or direct power, although the boys claim to own a gasoline generator.

While the heroes speak with John, Thomas fiddles with one of his grenades, pulling out the pin and putting it back in repeatedly. Heroes who make a successful Awareness–*perception* skill check realize what Thomas is doing. If the heroes seem distressed, Thomas slides the pin back into the grenade and sits patiently and quietly in the driver's chair, eyeing the heroes closely.

Heroes in close contact with either brother have the chance to notice a few more peculiarities. Each discovery requires a separate Awareness–*perception* check at a +2 step penalty:

- The Kellers do not blink very often, and when they do, the blinking is unnaturally slow. Observant heroes within 1 meter notice that the Kellers have a second set of eyelids, more like a milky, translucent film, under their normal human eyelids.
- Despite the warmth and humidity, the Kellers sweat very little. They also have no unpleasant body odor, despite having been in the swamp "for hours."
- Except for the hair on their heads, the Kellers are without facial hair. Their skin feels clammy to the touch and is almost completely hairless.

If the heroes defeat the brothers, they can commandeer the skiff and head west until they reach the Kellers' house. Steering the skiff requires a successful Vehicle Operation–*water* skill check. A failed check indicates that the swamprat has stalled, run aground, or (in the case of a Critical Failure) overturned. If the skiff runs aground, everyone in the rig must make a Dexterity feat check (or Acrobatics check, if the player prefers) to remain in the boat. A failed roll indicates d6s damage as the hero is thrown from the rig. Heroes thrown from an overturned skiff suffer no damage but must make a successful Movement–*swim* check to reach shore. Anyone who fails three *swim* checks in a row is attacked by a water moccasin; use the "Snake, Venomous" statistics presented on page 235 of the *Gamemaster Guide*.

A skiff that runs aground can be maneuvered back into the water with a successful Vehicle Operation–*water* skill check or a good push from the shore. An overturned skiff cannot be salvaged, forcing the heroes to make their way westward on foot. (In this case, the Gamemaster should plan at least one encounter with a hungry alligator or water moccasin.)

"Come out, come out, wherever you are!"

If the heroes "befriend" the Kellers, they are invited aboard the skiff and taken to the Kellers' house.

The trip from the downed plane to the Kellers' house takes 30 minutes. During that time, the heroes can ask questions or engage in idle discourse. The brothers do not speak unless spoken to, and their responses are curt and without emotion.

As night falls, the river darkens. While Thomas guides the boat through swampy channels, John picks up a portable flashlight lying on the floor of the skiff and lights the way. If the heroes have dispatched the brothers and claimed the skiff, they can use the flashlight in a similar fashion to ensure safe passage through the swamp. The flashlight's battery lasts for 1 hour.

Home Sweet Home

Whether the heroes deliberately set out for the Kellers' house or blindly head off into the bayou, their journey through the night invariably brings them here. Read or paraphrase the following text as the heroes near the house:

> Jutting from the nearby shore is a ramshackle wooden pier. The pier is illuminated by a gas lantern hanging from a wooden pole lashed to the end of the dock. Another swamprat is tied off on one side of the dock, but the nearer side is free.
>
> North of the dock, about 10 meters from the shore and set upon a grassy embankment, is a dark, two-story wooden house with a sagging roof. Its black windows glare emptily, and from the house you hear a soft, almost rhythmic clatter.

Tied to the dock is another swamprat identical to the one used by John and Thomas. Heroes who search the docked swamprat find two empty gasoline cans, several spent shotgun shells, and one loose stick of dynamite.

If the heroes think to ask John where the other Keller brothers might be, the presence of the second swamprat suggests that Bill and Dwight must have come home. John declines to reveal the possible whereabouts of Jimmy and Ron, however, saying only that "they weren't aboard the skiffs when they left this mornin'." (In fact, Jimmy and Ron spent the day running errands for the "master" and repairing a damaged rotor on the helicopter—see "Behind the House" for details.)

The Kellers' house is desolate and eerie. The structure is two stories high with a porch on the south side, facing the dock. The wood is unpainted and rotten, and many of the windows are either broken or splattered with mud. The porch and interior are adorned with skeletal alligator remains, mostly jawbones. This is the source of the "rhythmic clatter" heard down by the dock.

Den of Serpents

Lurking in the swamp are four more members of the Keller clan, all moccasin men. They automatically hear the sound of John's and Thomas's approaching swamprat. Bill and Dwight are concealed amid the trees and foliage about 10 meters from the house on the west and east sides, respectively, using their Stealth–*hide* skill to remain unseen. The remaining brothers, Jimmy and Ron, are lurking in the swampy field north of the house. They are more fully detailed in the "Behind the House" section.

If John and Thomas are still with the heroes, they lash their skiff to the dock and escort the heroes up to the house. The brothers keep their firearms handy as they lead the heroes to the front room (area **1**) where the radio is located. Once the heroes are led inside, Bill creeps around to the back door of the house (leading into the kitchen, area **3**) while Dwight crawls up onto the porch and prepares to ambush anyone coming through the front door or "pick off" any heroes by the dock. Heroes who remain near the dock who specifically watch the house must make an Awareness–*perception* skill check with a +2 step penalty to spot Dwight on the porch. (Dwight and his brothers are skilled at camouflage and know how to conceal themselves in dark shadows.)

If the heroes keep a sentry on the porch, Dwight changes tactics, instead crawling under the house and entering through the hole in the floor of the den (area **4**). Crawling under the house undetected requires a successful Stealth–*sneak* skill check.

The brothers wait until most or all of the heroes are inside the house before striking. As the heroes get the radio up and running, John and Thomas leap upon the two nearest heroes and attempt to bite them with their fangs. At the first sound of trouble, Bill bursts through the back door into the kitchen and begins hunting intruders with his .44 lever rifle. Dwight waits out on the porch, ready to take down any hero who flees the house or any hero positioned near the dock.

Professor Sanchevandez stays close to the heroes. However, her implant has an unexpected effect: When she comes within 2 meters of the radio in area **1**, the implant disrupts the radio signal, creating so much static that the heroes cannot clearly send or receive messages. When she moves away from the radio, the static clears. Veña claims to have no explanation for this minor phenomenon.

Ground Floor

Heroes exploring the ground floor of the house notice several shotgun holes punched through the interior walls. The holes create crawl spaces between the walls where the Keller boys reside when they want a cool, dark place to sleep. These holes also serve as excellent hiding places when the boys wish to ambush unwanted visitors.

1. Main Room. This area is a jumble of furniture haphazardly placed about the room. Mold and cobwebs cover the chairs and other furniture, and the windows are splattered with mud. Hanging from the ceiling, stacked upon tables, and strewn about the floor are hundreds of alligator bones that clatter and crunch as the heroes make their way into the room. A creaky staircase leads up to the second floor hallway (area **5**).

Pressed against the wall between the mud-splattered windows is a table with an old airplane radio sitting on it. The radio is powered by a rusted portable generator located on the floor beneath the table. The generator is temperamental and requires a successful Technical Science–*repair* skill check with a –1 step bonus to start. Operating the radio requires a successful System Operation–*communications* skill check at a –2 step bonus.

The range of the radio is limited; the only response within range comes from a lonely restauranteuse named Vicki-Lynn Richmond, who works at a roadside dive called the Alligator Café. The café is located 33 kilometers from the Kellers' house on a dirt road. Although she tries to be helpful, Vicki-Lynn isn't very bright. She has met the Keller boys a few times and doesn't consider them dangerous. She has no clue where the Alligator Café is in relation to the Kellers' house. A hero making a successful Interaction skill check (either to *bargain*, *bluff*, *charm*, or *intimidate*) can convince Vicki-Lynn to contact the local authorities. However, unless the heroes specifically instruct her to contact the police via radio, she actually closes the restaurant and drives to the nearest police station! After an hour's drive and several minutes spent asking for directions to the station, she alerts the police. Three cruisers (six officers) sent to investigate the Keller homestead take over 3 hours to arrive. (Finding the road leading to the Kellers' property proves quite difficult.) Once Vicki-Lynn leaves her radio, the heroes have no one else to contact for the next 3 hours.

2. Dining Room. A battered table with six rickety chairs dominates this moldy, cobweb-filled chamber. A window peers out onto the wetlands behind the house; the window pane is smashed and draped with clattering alligator bones.

The dining table is bare except for a worn, yellow-paged Merriam Webster dictionary (Tenth Edition) that lies open to page 816 and 817. (The first word on

the page is "opportunistic." The last is "orbit.") The dictionary was given to the Kellers by their master. (See "Behind the House" for details.) The boys have learned to enhance their vocabulary by reading this book, although they still find it difficult to string together the words they have learned.

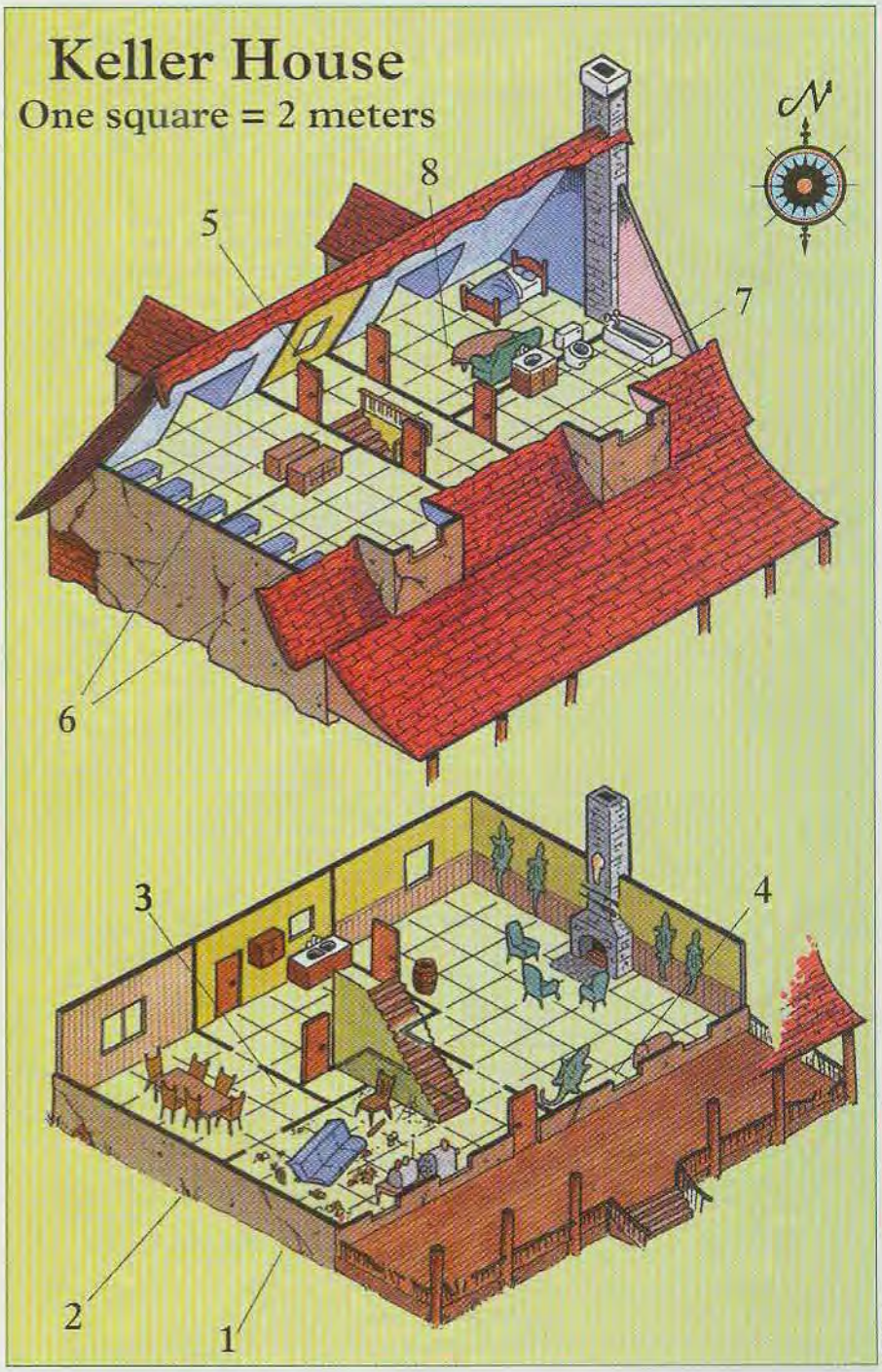
Hanging on the wall near the opening to the kitchen (area 3) is a gas-powered lantern on a hook. There is enough fuel in the lantern to sustain it for 2 hours.

3. Kitchen. Foul odors permeate this ill-kept kitchen. Wooden cupboards and shelves line the walls. The shelves are cluttered with cracked dishes, rusty hooks and knives, and dirty, empty jars. A shattered window draped with alligator bones looks out toward the wetlands north of the house. Below the window is a sink layered with scum.

Living in the cabinet under the sink is a venomous snake. (See page 235 of the *Gamemaster Guide* for statistics.) It lashes out once at anyone opening the cabinet door before recoiling into the dark recesses of the cabinet.

Hanging on the wall near the back door are the keys to a stolen 1999 Dodge pick-up. (The keychain is shaped like a small, rubber tire with the words "Made in the Good Ol' U.S.A." stamped on it.) The truck is parked 250 meters north and is not visible from the house. See the "Behind the House" section for details.

The door in the south corner of the kitchen leads to a pantry. Stuffed in this cubicle amid bare shelves are three putrified human corpses crawling with maggots. These are the remains of a boater and two tourists who blundered into the Kellers' bayou over a week ago. Heroes who fail a Stamina skill check are sickened by the stench and the display and spend a full round retching uncontrollably, during which time all actions suffer a +2 step penalty. Any hero making a successful Medical Science–*forensics* skill check at a –2 bonus (or a Knowledge–*deduce* skill check with no modifier) can determine that one man was killed by a rifle shot between the eyes, while the other two were each killed by a shotgun blast to the torso. The Keller boys hurled the victims' wallets into the swamp and sunk the boat after pillaging it.



Any hero who opens the door leading outside—or any hero circling the house to enter through the back door—should make an Awareness–*perception* skill check (with a –2 step bonus if they have a light source). A successful roll reveals a well-worn path leading from the back door into the swampy fields north of the house. Heroes making a successful Investigate–*track* skill check (with a –2 bonus if they have a light source) can follow the trail for 250 meters to its destination. In this event, proceed with the "Behind the House" section.

The Keller Brothers ("Moccasin Men")

level 6 mutant (human) male Combat Specs

STR	14	(2d6+8) [+2]	INT	10	(2d4+5)	
DEX	13	(2d4+8) [+2]	WIL	6	(d6+3)	[–1]
CON	14	(2d4+9)	PER	5	(d4+3)	

Durability: 14/14/7/7
Action check: 15+/14/7/3
Move: sp 26, ru 16, wa 6, eas 3, sw 6
Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2
Last Resorts: 0

Mutations/Drawbacks

Mutations: Enhanced STR (incl.), Enhanced CON (incl.), Natural Attack (bite), Poison Attack; Drawbacks: Toxin Intolerance, Minor Physical Change

Melee Attacks

Unarmed–*brawl*	15/7/5	d4+2s/d4+3s/d4+4s	LI/O
Bite*	14/7/3	1w/d4w/d4+1w	LI/O

Ranged Attacks

Shotgun	15/7/3	d4w/d6w/d4m	HI/O
.45 Revolver	15/7/3	d4+1w/d4+2w/d6m	HI/O
.44 Lever Rifle	15/7/3	d6w/d8+1w/d6m	HI/O
Grenade, Frag**	15/7/3	d4w/d4+2w/d6+2w	HI/G

* Bite injects neurotoxic venom only if the victim suffers primary damage. Resisting the venom requires a CON feat check with a +1 step penalty (onset time 1 minute; attack duration 4 hours). Damage from the poison depends on the feat check result: Critical Failure, d6+1m; Failure, d4+1m; Ordinary, d8+1w; Good, d6+1w; Amazing, d6+1s.

** Consult the *Player's Handbook*, page 180, for explosives rules.

Defenses

+2 STR resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+2 DEX resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Flak jacket: d6–2 (LI), d4–1 (HI), d6–3 (En)

Skills

Athletics [14]–*climb [15], jump [15], throw [15];* Unarmed Attack [14]–*brawl [15];* Modern Ranged Weapons [13]–*pistol [14], rifle [14];* Stealth [13]–*hide [14], sneak [14];* Vehicle Operation [13]–*air [14], land [14], water [14];* Movement [14]–*swim [16];* Stamina [14]–*endurance [15];* Knowledge [10]–*English language [11];* Technical Science [10]–*repair [12];* Awareness [6]; Investigate [6]–*track [7];* Interaction [5].

Equipment

John Keller: .44 lever rifle, two frag grenades
Thomas Keller: 12-gauge shotgun, .45 revolver, four frag grenades
William (Bill) Keller: .44 lever rifle, .45 revolver, two frag grenades
Dwight Keller: .44 lever rifle, three frag grenades
James (Jimmy) Keller: .45 revolver, two frag grenades
Ronald (Ron) Keller: 12-gauge shotgun, .45 revolver, two frag grenades

Background

The Keller brothers are mutants with human and water moccasin DNA. They were created by a Grey (a xenoform) named Jaagrel, whom the "boys" refer to as "the master" or sometimes as "our father." Inspired by an article on the Internet, Jaagrel named the Keller boys after American presidents. The boys exist to protect and serve Jaagrel. See "Behind the House" for details.

4. Den. This is where the Kellers skin their prey and strip the bones. The room is dark and full of shadows, and their air is filled with the odor of lime emanating from a barrel of the substance stashed in the corner near the door to the kitchen. The windows are covered with dry mud.

Nailed to the walls of this room are sixteen alligator hides. Arranged in an arc around the fireplace are three leather padded chairs with an alligator hide thrown over the back of each. Stools covered with alligator hide are positioned at the foot of each chair. The fireplace is filled with burnt wood and bones, and mounted above the mantel is a large alligator's head and two .30 bolt rifles. The rifles are loaded and ready to fire.

Against the south wall rests a tarred cedar chest. The lid is closed but not locked. Inside are 27 sticks of dynamite in a box, 36 shells for the .30 bolt rifles, 65 shells for the .44 lever-action rifles, 70 shells for a 12-gauge shotgun, and a box containing several hundred .45 caliber rounds. In addition to the ammunition, the chest contains a box of batteries, two bowie knives (use the statistics for "short sword" as presented in the *Player's Handbook*), and two steel hooks used for dragging gator carcasses.

In the southwest corner of the room, hidden beneath an alligator skin rug, is a 65-cm hole in the floor leading under the house. The Keller brothers use this hole for sneaking into and out of the house.

Second Floor

5. Upstairs Hallway. The stairs leading up to this hallway creak ominously, but heroes can traverse the hall quietly by making a successful Stealth–*sneak* skill check. The hallway is bare and unremarkable. A window, jagged shards of glass still lodged in the frame, looks out onto the wetlands north of the house.

6. Bedrooms. Each of these rooms contains three uncomfortable cots with dirt-stained mattresses as well as numerous alligator trophies mounted to the walls or suspended from the ceiling by wires. Each room also contains a simple wooden chair and dresser. Placed under leaks in the roof are metal buckets to

catch the water. The window in each room is cracked but otherwise intact.

If the heroes barricade themselves in either room, the Kellers can break down the door by making a successful Strength feat check. (The Gamemaster should roll once, with a –1 step bonus for each brother who assists the first and a +1 step penalty for each hero trying to hold the door closed.) If the brothers fail to open the barricaded door after one attempt, they blast open the door with a grenade or stick of dynamite on their next available action. Alternatively, one of the brothers might try to climb the outside walls of the house (requiring a successful Athletics–*climb* skill check) and smash through the window.

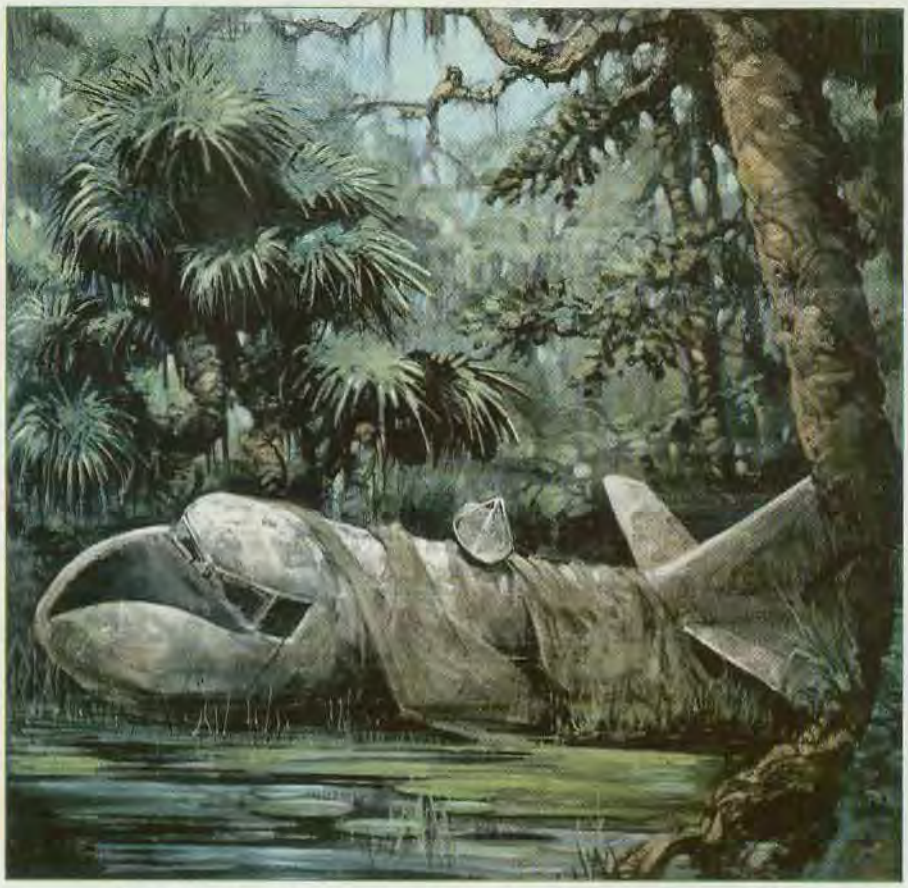
7. Bathroom. A porcelain bathtub occupies the far end of this dark room. The tub and surrounding floor have been claimed by mildew. A shattered sink, its pipes fully exposed, stands against the north wall. Above the sink is a cracked mirror, and between the sink and the tub rests a clogged toilet filled with scummy water. The window is smashed, although bits of jagged glass are still clutched in the frame.

8. Bedroom. Rain leaking through the roof has ruined or destroyed the contents of this dank chamber. A large bed rests in the northeast corner, its stained mattress harboring several unpleasant odors. Pushed against the south wall, across from the cracked window, is a rotted and sagging couch with mildew-covered cushions. In front of the couch is a stained oval table, atop which rests an old Polaroid camera. The camera flash still works and can take up to four pictures. Next to the camera are three badly focused snapshots:

The first picture was taken in front of the Keller's house. The picture shows one of the brothers (Bill) holding up a dead gator on a steel hook.

The second picture is a snapshot of the dead bodies stuffed in the kitchen pantry (area 3). The picture was taken prior to the bodies' putrefaction and would allow police to better identify the victims.

The third picture was taken behind the house, although this is not clearly evident. It shows the silver fuselage of a downed cargo plane. The aircraft looks quite old, has no wings, and is draped with camouflage nets. Heroes who study the picture closely see what looks like a small satellite dish jutting from the top of the plane, about midway along the fuselage. For details, see the "Behind the House" section below.



On the bayou, "low-rent housing" takes on a whole new slant.

The floor around the table and bed is rotted and weak. Any hero attempting to walk across the floor to reach the table or bed causes the floor to collapse. A successful Dexterity feat check or an Acrobatics–*fall* check (with a +2 step penalty of the hero took no precautions) allows the hero to either grab hold of the floor's edge and prevent a fall or land on the floor below safely; otherwise, the hero crashes into area 4, suffers d4w damage, and is unable to act until the Marginal phase of the following round.

Behind the House

Many surprises and terrors lurk in the swampy fields behind the Keller house. It is here that heroes can uncover the mysterious origins of the Keller brothers and discover a secret that has remained hidden in the bayou for the past 52 years.

In 1949, a privately owned cargo plane was transporting "scientific equipment" from New Mexico to North Carolina when it inexplicably veered off course and crashed in a Florida bayou. The owners of the downed aircraft were immersed in some illicit government affair and could not conduct a search for the missing aircraft without drawing undue attention to themselves, so they considered the plane "lost." The sole survivor of the crash was a xenoform captive, better known as a "Grey" to certain government agencies and Hoffmann Institute operatives. Using the equipment salvaged from the cargo plane, the

Grey attempted to construct a transmitter to contact his people. When this endeavor failed, the Grey devoted his time and energy to other, more familiar pursuits.

The Grey, Jaagrel, modified the scientific equipment aboard the aircraft to extract DNA from the dead crewmen. He then combined the humans' DNA with DNA taken from the indigenous wildlife. After decades of genetic tampering, Jaagrel created the first human-snake hybrid, or "moccasin man." The proto-creature died unexpectedly—poisoned by toxins in its own blood. The Grey spent the next several months perfecting an antitoxin, which he now administers in regular doses to keep his moccasin men alive.

Over the years, the Grey has refined his techniques, prolonging the lifespans of his moccasin men while using them to run errands and gather new equipment. In 1994, Jaagrel discovered the Internet. Since then he's been using online services to order supplies, deflecting the costs to other people's credit cards. The supplies are delivered to a post office box in a nearby town, where the Keller boys can fetch the equipment without arousing too much suspicion.

Jaagrel keeps his "boys" on a tight leash. Once the Grey becomes aware of the heroes, he does not allow them to leave the bayou alive. (The xenoform doesn't want his research to fall into the "wrong hands.") If necessary, Jaagrel uses his telepathy to transmit instructions to the Keller brothers.

Jaagrel's lair isn't difficult to find. The crashed cargo plane is located 250 meters north of the Keller house. Camouflage netting and dense foliage help to conceal the plane, which cannot be seen from the house; however, heroes who follow the path leading from the back door of the house spot the plane's silver fuselage at 50 meters away. Read or paraphrase the following once the heroes find the plane:

> The silver gleam of a large object catches the moonlight. You estimate that the object is at least 50 meters away. Moving cautiously through the tall, wet grass, you see that the object appears to be the broken fuselage of an old cargo plane, its cockpit angled slightly in your direction. The wings of the aircraft are nowhere in sight, and the fuselage is covered by a net of vines and leaves.
>
> Parked on a muddy trail that runs alongside the fuselage and disappears into the dark foliage is a pick-up truck. Although it is covered with mud, the truck is otherwise in good condition.

Lurking in the tall grass on either side of the path leading to the airplane are Jimmy and Ron Keller. They use their Stealth–*hide* skill to remain unseen and do not reveal themselves until the heroes come within 20 meters of the plane fuselage or the pick-up truck. If the heroes get too close to the plane or the truck, the brothers open fire with their guns. They do not hurl grenades so long as there's a chance of damaging the cargo plane, but they are not afraid to lob grenades at heroes who steer clear of the fuselage.

Those heroes who make a successful Awareness–*perception* check spot a small satellite dish atop the fuselage, midway between the cockpit and the tail. The dish, like much of the aircraft, is partially hidden by camouflage netting. Heroes specifically looking for the dish receive a –3 step bonus to their skill check. The only door leading into the cargo plane is on the south side, facing the heroes. There are no windows in the plane except the cockpit windows, which have been shattered. The interior of the cargo plane is fully detailed in the next section.

The 1999 Dodge Ram is a stolen vehicle, and the keys are hanging on the wall in the Kellers' kitchen. Any hero can hotwire the truck by making a successful Technical Science–*jury rig* skill check. The truck's front cab seats four comfortably, five in a crunch. Stored in the back of the truck are four plastic cans of gasoline. If the gasoline cans are ignited while in the back of the truck, the explosion not only destroys the truck but also inflicts d6+2m damage to anyone inside or on the truck at the time (regardless of the number of gas cans present). Heroes who use their action to throw themselves clear of the exploding truck (requiring a successful Athletics–*jump* or Acrobatics–*dodge* skill check at a +1 step penalty) reduce or negate damage depending on the result: Failure, full damage; Ordinary, d6+2w; Good d6+2s; Amazing, d4–1s.

Heroes who circle the cargo plane discover something hidden in a clearing on the north side of the fuselage:

> On the north side of the fuselage, less than 10 meters from the plane, is a small clearing. Resting in the middle of this clearing, covered with another camouflage net, is a small two-man helicopter.
>
> The helicopter looks like it was built from scratch by someone with questionable engineering expertise. The open-cockpit vehicle essentially consists of two chairs secured to a heavy engine surmounted by a pair of 6-meter rotor blades. The landing struts and tail of the helicopter are composed of lightweight aluminum.

The Keller brothers built this helicopter from scratch. The Kellers often use the vehicle to survey the bayou and help their brothers locate gators and unwelcome tourists. The makeshift chopper can only support the weight of two people, and flying it requires a successful Vehicle Operation–*air* skill check. Those unfamiliar with the design suffer a +1 step penalty to their skill checks.

The helicopter is fully fueled and has a range of 200 km. If the heroes make their escape aboard one of the skiffs or in the stolen pick-up, two of the Kellers pull the net off of the helicopter and follow the heroes in the air, dropping grenades onto the fleeing vehicle to prevent the heroes' escape. Rules governing Vehicle Combat are given in Chapter 12 of the *Player's Handbook*. Statistics for the pick-up truck are listed on page 194. Use the "Speedboat" statistics for the swamprats, but increase their durability to 8/8/4. For the Kellers' chopper, use the statistics for "Helicopter," but reduce the vehicle's durability to 6/6/3.

The Cargo Plane

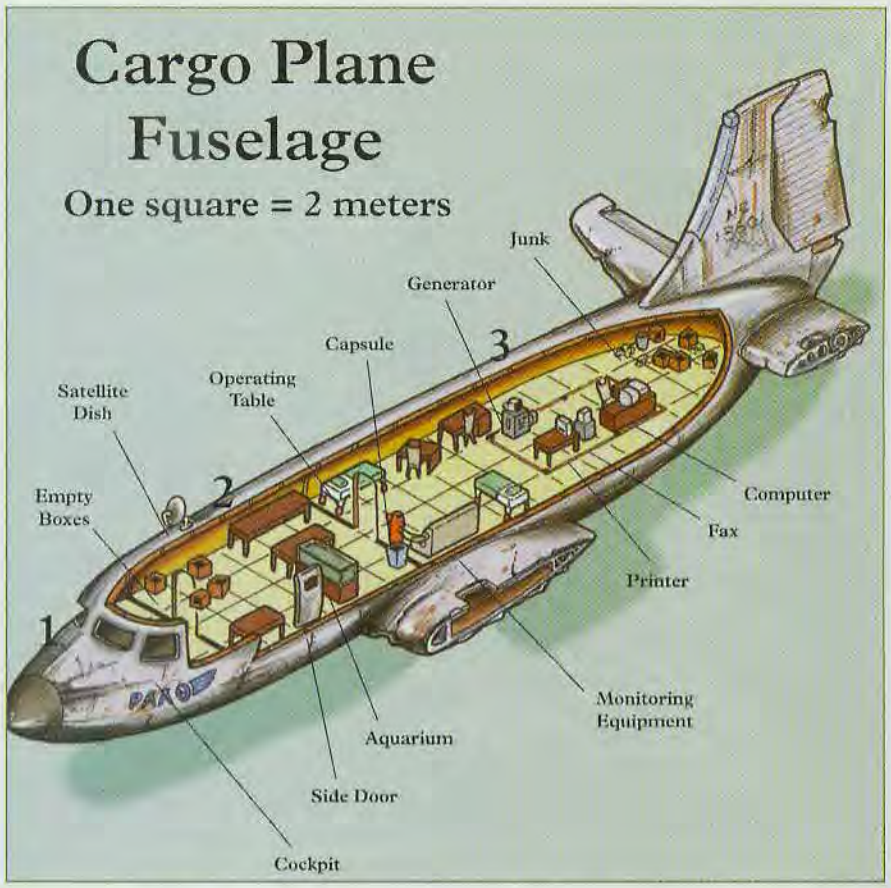
The configuration of this plane is unremarkable, and the cause of the crash cannot be ascertained readily. The plane went down after Jaagrel, who had been

sedated, regained consciousness in mid-flight. He telepathically compelled a guard to undo his restraints before *mind blasting* the pilot and co-pilot.

The wings of the aircraft were torn from the fuselage during the crash. The wings were later recovered and dismantled by the Kellers; the brothers used the parts to build the swamprats and the makeshift helicopter.

There are two clear points of entry: the silver metal door on the south side of the fuselage (leading to area 2) and the narrow windows in the cockpit (area 1). Heroes cannot open the side door without alerting the plane's occupant, as the door is badly corroded and squeals painfully when moved. Climbing up through the cockpit windows requires a successful Athletics–*climb* skill check; doing so quietly requires a successful Stealth–*sneak* skill check as well.

Disabling the satellite dish atop the fuselage can be accomplished with any successful hit. This effectively disables Jaagrel's Internet access and television reception, and it also alerts the xenoform to the presence of trouble.



1. Cockpit. The windows of the cockpit have been smashed inward. Bits of glass cover the controls, throttle assembly, and the skeletons of the pilot and copilot, both of whom are still strapped to their chairs. Heroes inspecting the corpses can clearly see that both the pilot and copilot wear tattered, unmarked uniforms and empty gun holsters.

Two more chairs at the rear of the cockpit once held the remains of the navigator and communications officer. Their bodies were removed by Jaagrel and subjected to countless genetic experiments before the remains were discarded.

None of the equipment in the cockpit works. Jaagrel and the Kellers have torn out the "guts" of the controls and used the parts for various projects. The radio was removed, repaired, taken back to the Kellers' house, and put to good use.

Heroes conducting a thorough search of the cockpit can make an Investigate–*search* skill check. A successful search locates a loaded .45 revolver beneath the navigator's seat. The weapon, removed from the pilot's holster, was hidden by Jaagrel for emergency use.

2. Passenger Cabin. The passenger seats have been torn out of the floor of this cabin and removed to make space for Jaagrel's equipment. The room contains a large rectangular aquarium, three metal tables, four opened boxes, and a waste paper basket. A curtain made from alligator hide and bones covers the open doorway leading to area 3.

The aquarium measures 3 meters long, 1 meter wide, and 2 meters deep. The glass walls are 3 cm thick. The tank is filled with swamp water and contains a live, adult water moccasin. This specimen is used in Jaagrel's genetic research and is the "mother" of the Keller boys. The snake is harmless while contained in the tank but makes threatening "jabs" at the walls of her tank as warm-blooded heroes approach. The Kellers feed the snake daily with live prey captured in the swamp.

The table nearest the door is covered with dirty beakers and flasks, as well as other miscellaneous lab equipment. The table standing nearest the aquarium is covered with trays of syringes, most of which have been used at least once and contain traces of a bluish fluid. Small, unmarked bottles of this fluid rest atop the third table. There is enough blue serum in these bottles for several dozen injections.

Analyzing the liquid requires proper equipment (like the microscope in Jaagrel's lab, area 3) and a successful Physical Science–*chemistry* skill check. Analysis reveals that the serum is a potent antitoxin that counteracts venom in the bloodstream. Another successful skill check, made after 2d8+8 minutes of further research, reveals that the serum was designed specifically to counteract water moccasin venom (and the Keller brothers' venomous bite). If the heroes lack the skill to make this diagnosis, Professor Sanchevandez offers to assist. Once the analysis is complete, a successful Medical Science–*medical knowledge* skill check reveals that a single injection will protect a person against the harmful effects of the venom for up to 24 hours.

Jaagrel

Level 10 Grey (xenoform) Tech Op

STR	7	INT	14 [+2]
DEX	10	WIL	13 [+2]
CON	7	PER	9

Durability: 7/7/4/4
Action check: 14+/13/6/3
Move: sp 16, ru 10, wa 4, eas 2, sw 4
Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2
Last Resorts: 1
Psionic Energy Points: 19

Attacks

Unarmed*	3/1/0	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Syringe**	3/1/0	special	LI/O
Mind Blast	14/7/3	d4+1s/d6+1s/d6+2s	—

* +d4 base situation die.

** Jaagrel is armed with a medical syringe containing a single injection of water mocassin venom. The syringe itself inflicts no measurable damage to the victim. However, resisting the neurotoxic venom requires a CON feat check with a +1 step penalty (onset time 1 minute; attack duration 4 hours). Damage from the poison depends on the feat check result: Critical Failure, d6+1m; Failure, d4+1m; Ordinary, d8+1w; Good, d6+1w; Amazing, d6+1s.

Defenses

+2 INT modifier vs. encounter skills
+2 WIL modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Modern Ranged Weapons [10]; Vehicle Operation [10]; Computer Science [14]–*hacking [17], programming [16];* Knowledge [14]–*computer operation [15], English language [16];* Life Science [14]–*biology [18], genetics [19], xenology [18], zoology [16];* Physical Science [14]–*chemistry [19];* System Operation [14]–*communications [15];* Awareness [13]–*intuition [14];* Resolve [13]–*mental [14];* Interaction [9]; Telepathy [9]–*contact [12], illusion [11], mind blast [11].*

Equipment

Jaagrel has access to anything in the cargo plane and his laboratory. If his mind blast power fails him, he lights a stick of dynamite (using a small fuel lighter) and hurls it at his opponent, far enough away to avoid being caught in the blast. He also keeps a .45 revolver hidden in the plane's cockpit.

Background

Jaagrel was one of several Greys conducting covert surveillance in New Mexico, attempting to liberate captured xenoform technology from a U.S. military installation near Roswell, New Mexico. Traveling incognito with the aid of his Telepathy–*illusion* skill, Jaagrel endeavored to gain access to the facility known as Area 51. A U.S. army colonel stationed at the base saw through Jaagrel's illusion but allowed the Grey to leave unharmed. Once outside, however, the xenoform was cornered and captured by several men in black, taken to a private airfield outside of Albuquerque, and flown to a secret facility in North Carolina for reasons that remain elusive.

Jaagrel has tried to send messages to his own people through the Internet, but to date he has not received any response. It's conceivable that the xenoforms will eventually locate Jaagrel and rescue him. Until then, Jaagrel is content to continue his experiments ...

If the heroes destroy all vials of the antitoxin and prevent Jaagrel from creating more serum, the Keller boys are slain by their own lethal physiology in 12 hours.

The boxes once contained computer and digital hardware (a monitor, CPU, printer, fax machine, satellite dish) but now contain extension cords, plastic wrappers, blocks of styrofoam padding, and instruction books.

The wastepaper basket in the corner behind the aquarium holds several pairs of greasy and stained latex gloves as well as a few broken syringes and decayed rodent carcasses.

3. Cargo Compartment. As the heroes part the curtain leading into the cargo compartment, they hear strange voices and sounds emanating from within. A successful Knowledge–*deduce* skill check reveals that the source of the voices and sounds is a television located somewhere in the cabin beyond.

Should the heroes manage to surprise Jaagrel, they find the small, gray xenoform seated at a computer terminal, engaged in a chat room discussion with a dozen prominent UFOlogists, sharing words regarding the U.S. government's use of hypnotism as a means to silence self-proclaimed alien abductees.

If Jaagrel is not surprised, he is using his Telepathy–*illusion* to make himself appear as a bald, harmless-looking, middle-aged man with a pair of plastic goggles strapped to his forehead. He tries to imprint this illusion onto all of the heroes present; for each target beyond the first, apply a +1 step penalty to Jaagrel's skill check. As the heroes enter, Jaagrel watches them from behind his desk, his syringe in hand but concealed by the illusion. Heroes who make an Investigate–*search* check have no trouble spotting him in the shadows.

If confronted by a single hero, Jaagrel takes a chance and uses his *mind blast* power. If the hero is incapacitated by the *mind blast*, Jaagrel rushes up and injects the hapless hero with the syringe, then rushes to the cockpit (area 1) to grab the revolver hidden there.

If approached by several heroes at once, Jaagrel uses his Telepathy–*contact* skill to summon one or more of the Keller boys to him. He tries to delay the

heroes until help arrives. Although the xenoform understands English and can relay his thoughts telepathically, he cannot speak aloud without revealing his true nature. (His voice sounds completely inhuman, and he finds the language difficult to pronounce.) Thus, he tries to remain silent for as long as possible until help arrives or until he's attacked and forced to defend himself.

Assailed by multiple foes and without the syringe to defend himself, Jaagrel quickly surrenders. Any illusion sustained by the xenoform disappears once he's dead; heroes might not realize Jaagrel's true nature until it is too late.

The cargo door, located toward the rear of the compartment, cannot be opened from inside or out. Placed upon the cargo door is an L-shaped desk, atop which sits the monitor and keyboard for Jaagrel's Pentium III computer. Jaagrel's important files are encrypted, and deciphering them requires a Computer Science–*hacking* or Investigate–*cryptography* complex skill check (7 successes). Once the encryption code has been cracked, heroes can access any of the files with a successful Computer Science or Knowledge–*computer operation* skill check. (Tech Ops receive a –1 step bonus to their rolls.)

Stored on Jaagrel's computer are his research notes regarding the creation of "moccasin men." However, to decipher the notes, a Life Science–*genetics* skill check at a +4 step penalty is required. Successfully applying the knowledge in actual experiments would entail a complex skill check (9 successes) with a +2 step penalty to each roll.

Also stored on Jaagrel's hard drive is the chemical formula for the antitoxin to counteract the Keller boys' poison and the reasons behind its creation.

If the heroes try to use the computer to send a message to the Hoffmann Institute, proceed with the next section.

Heroes browsing Jaagrel's desktop discover a recently downloaded guide for installing home solar panels, a list of online distributors, and a list of conspiracy theory websites. Hidden inside the CD-Rom is a gold-plated CD containing a program designed by Jaagrel to identify the numbers, expiration dates, and owners of several thousand credit cards used online in the past 4 months.

"Don't bug me. I found a secret room on Level 23."

Next to the computer desk is a small table with a fax machine, beside which is a table with a color printer. Also on the plane's cargo door is a gas generator with a small, portable television tuned into the Sci-Fi Channel (more precisely, a *Star Trek* original series episode in which Mr. Spock's brain is abducted by aliens). The television and computer terminal are both attached to a satellite dish affixed to the roof of the plane. Wires attached to the television and computer terminal can be seen running up through small holes in the ceiling.

Toward the front of the cabin is Jaagrel's laboratory. A swiveling stool has been placed in front of a desk cluttered with scientific paraphernalia, jars of biological cultures, small plant and animal specimens, and various extracted toxins in small, unlabeled jars. Amid the clutter is a powerful and expensive microscope that Jaagrel purchased online The desk has three drawers stuffed with syringes, numerous pairs of latex gloves, pharmaceuticals, protective masks, and plastic goggles.

The desk with the microscope rests between two operating tables. Neither table is currently in use.

To the left of the curtain, in the corner, is a brine-filled metal capsule 1.4 meters wide and 3.1 meters long. Jaagrel uses this capsule to "grow" moccasin men once they develop beyond the embryonic stage. Next to the "growth capsule" is a device that Jaagrel constructed using a hospital electrocardiogram; the device is designed to monitor the neural and cardiovascular development of whatever specimen and is wired to the capsule. The capsule is currently unoccupied.

All of the electronic hardware in this cabin is powered by the gas generator. Toward the back of the cabin, amid boxes of scrap metal and broken glassware, are two boxes, each containing a solar panel that Jaagrel purchased online. The xenoform plans to offset his dependency on the worn-out generator by installing solar panels on the fuselage roof. However, he has yet to figure out how the panels are installed.

Contacting the Institute

Provided the heroes do not destroy Jaagrel's computer or satellite dish, they can use the hardware and the xenoform's Internet access to send a priority message to the Hoffmann Institute website, which is monitored constantly.

Sending a message to the Hoffmann Institute requires a Computer Science or Knowledge–*computer operation* skill check with no modifier. Encoding the message requires a successful Computer Science–*programming* skill check.

Assuming the message is sent properly, the Institute sends a coded reply confirming receipt of the message within d12 minutes. (The coded response can be deciphered by any hero making a successful Computer–*hacking*, Knowledge–*deduce*, or Investigate–*cryptography* skill check. Agents who work for the Institute's Intelligence Division, including Professor Sanchevandez, receive a –2 step bonus to the roll.) The response also activates a trace that allows the Institute to pinpoint the heroes' location on an electronic map with the aid of a global positioning satellite (GPS).

If the heroes report that Professor Sanchevandez is dead, the Hoffmann Institute makes arrangements to recover her body and the etoile implant. If the heroes reveal their knowledge of the implant, the Institute instructs them to remain where they are and makes arrangements to extract them from the scene as quickly as possible. Four hours after the message is sent, a military helicopter arrives to collect Professor Sanchevandez, the implant, and the heroes. If the heroes make good their escape, they are eventually debriefed. The Institute provides no insight into the true nature of the implant and refuses to divulge the ultimate fate of Professor Sanchevandez. Heroes who pursue the matter on their own learn that the professor, if she is still alive, is "recovering from surgery and is scheduled to return to work in a month."

If the heroes report the presence of xenoform, alive or dead, the Institute sends an additional military helicopter with a mobile containment facility and a host of scientists in radiation suits to safely remove the xenoform. If Jaagrel is taken alive by the Institute, his fate is not disclosed during the heroes' debriefing.

If the heroes insist that a team be sent to examine the wreckage of the Institute jet, it is quickly determined that Flight 000 was downed by an electromagnetic pulse. The Intelligence Division confirms that an American satellite "accidentally" discharged an EMP pulse, but the heroes could be assigned to investigate the matter further—a trail that would no doubt lead them into conflict with the sandmen and their etoile masters.

They're Watching You!

If the heroes neglected or failed to encode their message to the Hoffmann Institute, one of two things might happen. First, if the heroes mention either Professor Sanchevandez or the alien implant, sandmen webwatchers track the message back to its point of origin and send a force to retrieve the implant before the Hoffmann Institute's extraction team arrives. Second, if the heroes mention the presence of a xenoform, alive or dead, their message is intercepted by an unidentified Institute Intelligence operative with secret ties to the U.S. government's Center for Xenological Studies (CXS). In quick response, the Center sends Dr. Regor Prometheus, one of their xenoform experts, to recover the Grey before the Hoffmann Institute extraction team arrives. Dr. Prometheus travels to the scene in a U.S. government helicopter, flashing a government badge; he stops at nothing to recover the xenoform and eliminates any non-military personnel (other than himself) who comes into contact with the xenoform.

Sandmen are everywhere. They have no trouble reaching the heroes before the Hoffmann Institute extraction team. Three of them arrive by black helicopter, brandish false identification, and lure Sanchevandez aboard. Once they think they have the implant, they eliminate any troublesome opposition and make good their escape. Sanchevandez is neither seen nor heard from again.

Meanwhile, a mole working inside the Hoffmann Institute provides Dr. Regor Prometheus with whatever information is needed to locate the xenoform. The heroes might return to the Institute's headquarters in Chicago only to realize during their debriefing that the xenoform was intercepted and "confiscated" by government agents while being transported across country in an unmarked van. They might even be assigned to recover the xenoform, placing them in direct conflict with the evil doctor.

Sandmen are detailed in Chapter 8: Xenoforms of the DARK•MATTER Campaign Setting. Dr. Prometheus and the CXS are presented in Chapter 6: Illuminati. If this scenario is used as a prelude to a DARK•MATTER campaign, the Gamemaster might consider using the sandmen and Dr. Prometheus as recurring villains—or uneasy allies—showing up whenever the heroes least expect them.

Achievement Awards

For escorting Professor Sanchevandez safely back to the Institute, each hero should receive 2 achievement points. If Sanchevandez is killed but the implant is successfully recovered, award each hero 1 achievement point instead.

In addition to the award for achieving their primary goal, heroes should receive 1 additional achievement point for every three moccasin men slain (up to a maximum of 2 points). Destroying Jaagrel's entire supply of antitoxin ensures the death of all six moccasin men within 12 hours.

Finally, the heroes should receive 1 achievement point if Jaagrel or his remains are successfully retrieved by the Institute. Ω

MARVEL SUPER HEROES ADVENTURE GAME

Super Heroes Destroy Manhattan in 4 Hours

When Wizards of the Coast needs a master of the Marvel arts, we turn to Game Designer and Creative Director Mike Selinker. Here's his take on the year behind and the year ahead:

In 1999, the MARVEL SUPER HEROES® Adventure Game hit with the force of the Hulk in a china shop. First up were March's Fantastic Four Roster Book and April's Fantastic Four: Fantastic Voyages adventure. Both gave Marvel fans the chance to play star-spanning explorations of strange phenomena, with such heavy-hitters as Galactus, Doctor Doom, the Silver Surfer, and the Inhumans. The FF Roster contained the weirdest assortment of Marvel characters yet, including starfaring races like the Kree, the Skrulls, and the Eternals. The Fantastic Voyages adventure took the heroes from far into deepest space to down, down, down into the bloodstream of a hero.

The warmth of summer heralded the arrival of *The Reed Richards Guide to Everything*, the long-awaited first rules expansion for the MARVEL SUPER HEROES game. But this was no mere collection of charts and tables. The *Richards Guide* was everything you ever wanted to know about the Marvel universe, explained by the greatest super-genius of our time, Mr. Fantastic. For each new rule explained, Reed would answer a related question from a child of the Marvel Universe. Reed's answers to questions like "How can Archangel fly?" and "If I stand next to a nuclear reactor, will I grow wings?" fascinated the readers of this highly anticipated product.

The Marvel game's attempts to reach out to readers of Marvel comics began in earnest in late 1999. Fans saw the widespread release of *Wolverine vs. the Brood Queen* (also appearing in *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #264), a slam-bang introductory adventure that went to every comics store in America. More such games—*Captain America vs. Baron Zemo*, *The Thing vs. Doctor Doom*, and so on—followed in other magazines, assuring that comics readers everywhere had a chance to play this exciting game.

And this prepared readers for what was up in the year 2000: over a dozen short adventures formatted like comic books. Spider-Man, the Age of Apocalypse, and many more cool subjects will be winging their way to you in the year 2000.

There's a lot more on the table that we're aching to tell you, but even we've got our rules. Trust us when we say, we want to play this stuff as much as you do. Stay tuned, true believer.

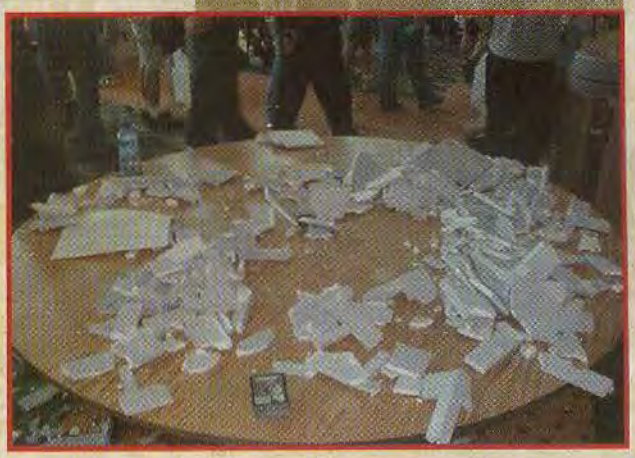
Manhattan Before

Marvel hit the summer conventions in a big way!

Mere words can't describe the Marvel Slam-A-Thon, the GEN CON® Game Fair's ultra-huge smackdown for charity. Fans donated $5 to Toys for Tots to purchase a Toy Biz action figure of their favorite Marvel character, then went toe-to-toe in a Styrofoam Manhattan. Far from protecting the city, our goal was to smash Manhattan over the course of four hours, which the participants did with zeal. After all, how often do you get to smash stuff for a good cause?

-M.S.

Manhattan After



MARVEL SUPER HEROES ADVENTURE GAME

Mastering the Mystic Arts

Magic and Mysticism in the Marvel Super Heroes™ Adventure Game

by Stephen Kenson

Hoggoth, Oshtur, and dark Valtorr, Faltine, Agamotto, and Raggadorr, Seraphim, Watoomb, and Cyttorak, Satannish, Ikonn, and cold Denak, By the Vishanti's eternal light, Powers of magic, protect us tonight!
— Dr. Strange, Sorcerer Supreme

The mystic arts are powers of magic far beyond the ken of ordinary mortals. It is in the shadowy world of mysticism that magicians like Dr. Strange, Earth's Sorcerer Supreme, maintain eternal vigilance against hordes of demons, evil wizards, and cosmic beings from other dimensions, protecting an unsuspecting populace from their dire plots.

The Game Book for the Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game provides basic information on the power of magic and those who wield it. This article offers an expanded look at the mystic arts in the Marvel Universe, with additional information and options usable by players and Narrators alike.

MARVEL COMICS

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Magic

What is magic? According to the Sorcerer Supreme, magic is the study of forces and how to use them to cause things to happen. A magician who learns how to manipulate the right energies can do almost anything. Magicians are limited only by the extent of their knowledge and will. Magic is not like other powers because it is not granted by cosmic rays, mutation, strange machines, or chemicals. Magic is learned through years of intense study and practice. While everyone may have some potential to wield magic, only a select few have the drive, dedication, and willpower needed to develop that talent into true skill in the mystic arts.

The great majority of magicians are novices who have learned a few spells here and there, but do not have the skill of a true Master of the Mystic Arts. The MARVEL Game Book refers to them as "dabblers." The Scarlet Witch is one such individual, and Dr. Doom is another. Although she knows some true magic, the Scarlet Witch relies for the most part on her mutant hex power. Likewise, the Lord of Latveria prefers the tools of science to those of sorcery.

Novices have a Magic intensity of 9 or less. They choose spells (stunts) from a limited list of powers, generally as follows: Astral Projection, Detection (Magic), Dimensional Travel, Energy Blast, Ensnarement, ESP, Force Field, Illusion, Life Support, Telekinesis, Telepathy, and Teleportation (Self, Summoning). Novices must also draw a card whenever casting a spell. If the card's value is greater than the novice's Magic rating, the spell fails; if the aura of the card is negative, a mishap occurs, the details of which are left to the Narrator.

Magicians with a Magic intensity of 10 or greater are masters of the mystic arts, able to duplicate virtually any Power with a trump suit of Intellect or Willpower as a spell. Magic does not normally allow a mage (even a master) to affect his or her own body, ability scores, or skills. For this reason, mages often make use of various helpers and henchmen to handle physical matters. Even heroic sorcerers like Dr. Strange regularly call upon the help of other heroes.

These Intellect- and Willpower-based powers cannot be duplicated using Magic: Chi, Cosmic Energy Control, Luck Control, Power Duplication, and Reality Warping. Many other powers are rarely, if ever, duplicated by magicians, including: Computer Link, Darkforce Control, Gravity Control, Kinetic Control, Pheromones, Radar, Radiation Control, and Sonar. The Narrator should consider carefully before allowing a mage to duplicate these powers.

Magical Dimension

Masters of the mystic arts explore countless dimensions. Some are safe, while others are filled with dangerous creatures. Asgard, Olympus, Heliopolis, and several related dimensions are home to the gods of myth, as well as many creatures like trolls, giants, hydras, and the like.

The Astral Plane is an abstract place of floating shapes. Heroic sorcerers often try to shift their battles here, to protect innocent people on Earth who might get caught in a magical "crossfire."

The Dark Dimension is the domain of the Dread Dormammu, a Lord of Chaos and powerful sorcerer. It is a magical world of floating islands, abstract shapes and mystical energy. It is bordered by the Domain of the Mindless Ones and ruled from the grand palace, where Dormammu schemes to take control of Earth's dimension. Although he has been deposed several times, first by his sister Umar and later his niece Clea, Dormammu always regains control of the Dark Dimension to plot anew.

The Dream Dimension is the realm of Nightmare. It is the place where humans go when they dream. Nightmare sometimes takes the opportunity to torment a helpless mortal, but he has been thwarted many times by Dr. Strange and other mystic heroes.

Spells

Spells shape magical energy to create an infinite variety of effects. Spells draw energy from two basic sources: personal and external.

Personal Magic: Personal energy spells draw on the magician's inner reserves of strength. Powers that use personal energies are: Astral Projection, Detection (Magic), ESP, Illusion, and Telepathy.

These spells do not require any special incantations or gestures, only a modicum of concentration on the part of the magician. A magician can cast these spells even while bound or otherwise restrained. Personal spells still take place as Contingent Actions, as described on page 164 of the MARVEL Game Book.

A magician can cast personal spells without being noticed by making a *daunting Magic* action. The difficulty is only *average* against opponents with the Overconfident hindrance. (See page 109 of the Game Book.) Dr. Strange uses this tactic against Overconfident foes like Mordo or the dread Dormammu quite often, loosing his astral form or creating an illusion to distract his foe and give Strange time to overcome him.

External Magic: All other spells require the magician to tap into external sources of energy, either from the Earth or other dimensions, using names of power, incantations, and gestures to summon and direct the energy. The magician must be free to speak and move to cast these spells. A mage who is gagged, silenced, or bound can use only personal energies. Some of the more common magical powers are described here, along with the names used to invoke them.

Dimensional Travel: Magicians travel between dimensions and often deal with beings from other dimensions. Magic makes use of two new stunts of Dimensional Travel. *Gate* creates a door between two dimensions, allowing travelers to simply step through. Keeping the gate open requires an *average Magic* action for each exchange beyond the first. *Banishment* sends a target to another dimension chosen by the caster, requiring an *average Magic (Willpower)* action. Dimensional Travel spells include the Mists of Hoggoth, the Shades of the Seraphim, and the Winds of Watoomb. The Hoary Hosts of Hoggoth, the Fires of Satannish, and the dreaded Spell of Eternal Vanishment are Banishment spells.

Elemental Control: The powers of Air, Earth, Fire, Water, and Weather Control are common for magicians, especially followers of a neutral nature magic school. Power over the elements is granted by Gaia, the Earth Mother, as well as many elemental spirits.

Schools of Magic

Magic-wielders in the Marvel Universe fall into one of three broad categories or "schools."

Order magic, also known as white or good magic, is based around protection, truth, and the maintenance of order in the universe. It is the school of magic followed by such powerful sorcerers as Dr. Strange and his mentor, the Ancient One.

Neutral magic, often known as nature magic or gray magic, focuses on principles beyond good and evil, such as the forces of the natural world or the rules of the scientific method. Mystics like Shaman from Alpha Flight practice neutral magic, as do alchemists like Diablo, showing that neutral magic can be used for either good or evil.

Chaos magic, also known as black or evil magic, is based around destruction, deception, and the creation of chaos and disorder. Magical villains like Baron Mordo and Dormammu are masters of such magic.

Energy Blast: The standard magical Energy Blast is called a Bolt of Bedevilment, which is taught to every novice. Additionally there are the Baleful Bolts of Balthakk (black lightning), Crystals of Cyndriarr (dozens of flat, razor-sharp squares), the Crimson Crystals of Cyttorak (sharp, reddish crystals), the Daggers of Daveroth (flat red triangles), the Disks of Denak (flat purple circles), the Flames of the Faltine (green flames), the Light of Agamotto (bright light, usable only against evil creatures), the Seven Suns of Cinnibus (blazing light), the Storms of Satannish (lightning bolts), and many others.

Ensnarement: Magicians often use spells to entrap foes. The most famous is the Crimson Bands of Cyttorak, but there are many others, including the Chains of Krakkan, the Dark Vapors of Valtorr, Icy Tendrils of Ikthalon, and the Roving Rings of Raggadorr. Some spells provide the *Multiple Targets* stunt of Ensnarement, trapping all opponents within firing distance, such as the Ribbons of Raggadorr and the Seven Bands of Cyttorak.

Force Field: The most common magical force field is the Shield of the Seraphim. There are many other sorts of defense, including the Conjured Crystal of Cyttorak (a reddish crystal), a Nirvalonic Sphere (which gains +2 intensity, but is immobile once created), and the Seraphim's Grim Shield (which provides Detection (Evil) in addition to protection). Magicians also use force fields to trap opponents with spells like Dyzakk's Cage, the Scarlet Sphere of Cyttorak, the Shining Circle of the Seraphim, and one of the Spells of the Omnipotent Oshtur.

Nullification: Magic is used to nullify many things, particularly other magic. Some common nullification spells include the Flames of the Faltine (vs. Animation, Ensnarement, or Mind Control), In the Name of the All-Freeing (vs. bonds and mental control), the Hosts of Hoggoth (vs. all Magic), the Illusions of Ikonn (vs. Illusions), the Light of Agamotto (vs. bonds and Mind Control), the Light of Nirvalon (vs. Emotion Control), the Mystic Moons of Munnopor (vs. energy fields), Oshtur's Mighty Hands (vs. all Magic), the Shades of the Seraphim (vs. Ensnarement), and the Stumbling Vapors of Valtorr (vs. Agility).

Teleport: Mages can move across the face of the world in an instant using spells like the Winds of Watoomb or the Shades of the Seraphim. They also use Summoning spells to bring objects and creatures to them, such as the Demons of Denak, which summons a group of demons to serve the caster, or the Flames of Falroth, which can summon any item or being known to the caster.

Transmutation: Magic can transform virtually anything. The Weirdling Planes of Pholdak is a complex spell that requires three exchanges to cast (any interruption spoils the spell). It requires an *average Magic (Willpower)* action and turns the target two-dimensional, like a pane of glass. If the target is shattered (an *average Strength* action), it is destroyed. This spell is quite rare, found only in a few obscure books and scrolls. More mundanely, magicians use Transmutation to repair broken objects, transform their clothes, and waterproof their spooky old mansions and towers.

Miscellaneous Spells: There are far too many spells to describe them all, but here are a few of the classics. The Light of Agamotto and the glow of the Mystic Moons of Munnopor can have a Blinding effect on evildoers. Daranthon's Lost Lore provides Detection spells. The Sign of the Seraphim lets a mage reflect a spell back at its caster (Energy Reflection). The Illusions of Ikonn can create any type of Illusion. The Images of Ikonn induce specific feelings (Emotion Control). The Munnopor's Mystic Maze, the power of Amtor the Unspeakable, and the Wheel of Bromagdon induce Paralysis. The Mists of Morpheus provide the Sedation stunt of Psychic Blast. The Mists of Munnopor and the Vapors of Valtorr cover an area out to firing distance with a dense mist that acts like Shadow Control. The Spell of Silence provides the Silence stunt of Sonic Control.

The mystic trinity of the Vishanti (Agamotto, Hoggoth, and Oshtur) is the greatest magical force for good known, capable of granting virtually any spell, and is often invoked by good sorcerers.

Magical Items

Many different magical items are spoken of in the annals of history in the Marvel Universe. The most powerful items are in the keeping of Earth's Sorcerer Supreme, Dr. Strange. Other items are unearthed from time to time and fall into the hands of sorcerers seeking to abuse their powers or, worse yet, people who have no idea of their powers and dangers. It's up to the heroes to keep that from happening.

There are spellbooks containing magical lore. The Book of the Vishanti contains nearly every good magic spell gathered by Earth's Sorcerers Supreme, while the Darkhold is the ultimate tome of evil magic. Other books may contain scraps of lore useful to magicians.

Items like the legendary Wand of Watoomb increase a magician's powers. The wand grants its wielder ESP 20 and the *Rangeless* stunt for Magic. It can also absorb magical energy directed at the wielder and convert it into power for spells (Absorption 20 with the stunts of *Absorption Conversion* and *Healing*). Dr. Strange's Orb of Agamotto provides ESP 20 across space and dimensions.

Magician heroes can also make magical items on their own, using the Equipment rules from the MARVEL Game Book or the expanded inventing rules from Mike Selinker's article "Super Science in the Marvel Universe" in *DRAGON Magazine Annual*

Magical Creatures Table

Name	Str	Agl	Int	Wil	Health
Cultists	3X	3X	2D	4X	10
Demons	6X	3X	1X	3X	10
Elementals	8X	8X	1X	1X	10
Eye-Killers	9X	6X	6X	6X	17
Gargoyles	12X	6X	2X	1X	10
G'uranthic Guardian	16X	4X	2X	12X	20
Mindless Ones	8X	3X	1X	1X	10
Vampires	11X	13X	4X	1X	10
Zombie	8X	1X	0X	0X	10

Name	Powers/Skills	Hindrances	Calling
Cultists	Some have **Magic** 1–5; **Occult**	Obsessive (cult)	World-Domination
Demons	Claws and Teeth +2, **Poison** 10, **Wings** 6	Susceptible (silver)	Demolisher
Elementals	**Body Armor** +4, **Invulnerability to Element**, **Nature Control** (by type) 8	Susceptible (to opposite element)	Guardian (of element)
Eye-Killers	**Claws** +2, **Energy Blast** 12, **Enhanced Vision** 9, **Imitation** 9	Fatally Vulnerable (sunlight)	Vengeance
Gargoyles	**Additional Limb** (tail) 6, **Body Armor** +4, **Claws** and **Horns** +2, **Transmutation** (into gargoyle) 9, **Wings** 6	None	Demolisher
G'uranthic Guardian	**Body Armor** +4, **Life Drain** (Psychic Vampirism) 16	Physically Disabled (cannot move)	Guardian
Mindless Ones	**Body Armor** +4, **Energy Blast** 8, **Invulnerability** to Mental Control, **Regeneration** 20	Bruiser	Demolisher
Vampires	**Animal Form** [A] 10 (Bat), **Animal Form** [A] 10 (Wolf), **Body Armor** [S] +10, **Body Transformation** 10 (Gaseous Form), **Hypnosis** 15, **Immortality, Invulnerability** (to nonsilver weapons with damage bonuses less than +6), **Life Drain** 8 (Telepathic Control), **Life Support** 20, **Regeneration** 10.	Addicted to Blood, Fatally Vulnerable to sunlight and running water, Phobic of crosses, garlic, and entering a building without invitation, Triggered—powerless by a stake through the heart	Uncontrolled Power (Demolisher)
Zombies	**Immortality, Life Support** 20		Soldier

depths of the mansion and doesn't return for weeks, his friend Wong becomes worried and contacts the heroes. They have to make their way through the bizarre rooms and halls of the mansion to find Dr. Strange and figure out what happened to him.

★ A cult has plans to bring its demonic patron to Earth, using a complex magical ritual that requires a human sacrifice. Unfortunately for them, the sacrifice they've chosen is a friend or loved one of one of the heroes. They have to track down the cult before it's too late, and probably end up confronting the cult's demon master.

★ The heroes are "spellnapped" from Earth to another dimension. Sorcerers in that dimension are fighting an invasion of magical creatures like demons or Mindless Ones and cast a spell to summon aid. It brought the heroes. Now they have to use their powers to help stem the tide of the invasion and find some way to turn it back. Things get more interesting if there is a powerful mage, like Baron Mordo or the Dread Dormammu himself, behind the invasion.

★ The heroes are plagued by terrible nightmares that make it impossible for them to get any rest. They become tired, listless, and cranky during the day. It turns out that Nightmare is responsible for the bad dreams. He is using the psychic energy gathered from the nightmares to extend the power of his domain, causing more bad dreams, until everyone is trapped in a permanent nightmare they can't escape. Mystic heroes may sense that the nightmares are more than they seem. The heroes need to go into the dream dimension to confront Nightmare and their own worst fears.

For more inspiration in creating magical spells, items, and adventures, look no further than Marvel comics themselves.

Steve Kenson, Freelancer Supreme, is a lifelong fan of Dr. Strange and a contributor to supplements for the Marvel Super Heroes *Adventure Game.*

#3. The mage must have the Occult skill, and Magic intensity is substituted for Intellect in the inventing process. The Narrator should take care not to allow magician heroes to create items that spoils the fun of the game. Magical inventions also provide lots of opportunities for backfires, thefts by cultists or evil sorcerers, or quests for exotic or rare materials, some of which might only be available in other dimensions.

Magical Creatures

There are many different magical creatures on Earth and in other dimensions. Some are the servants of powerful sorcerers, while others are villains in their own right.

Cultists worship extra-dimensional beings who seek dominion over Earth. Individual cultists have little power, but as a group they can be dangerous. They have names like the Cult of Sligguth, the Dark Cabal, the Darkholders, the Sons of Satannish, and many others.

Demons come in many different shapes, all of them nasty. Some have more powers than those listed, including Body Armor, Cold Control, Fire Control, Horns, and various Resistances. They are summoned to serve sorcerers or sent by their infernal masters to serve their cults on Earth.

Elementals are spirits of the primal elements: air, earth, fire, and water. They can be conjured by magicians to serve them. The statistics provided are for a fairly typical elemental. Those summoned by more powerful magicians have higher Strength, Agility, and Element Control. See the Alchemy power on page 129 of the MARVEL Game Book for more information.

Eye-Killers are Native American spirits with the head of an owl, the forepaws and upper body of a lion, and the lower body of a snake. They project bolts of energy from their large eyes. They can assume human form and sometimes serve evil sorcerers.

Gargoyles are animated creatures of stone. They can turn other people into gargoyles by touch and are found in the service of evil sorcerers.

The G'uranthic Guardian watches over the gateway to the Dark Dimension. It is a giant, multi-armed statue of stone with a single eye that projects a will-sapping beam.

The Mindless Ones are also inhabitants of the Dark Dimension. They are walled off by a powerful spell cast by Dormammu, since they are beings of endless violence. They exist only to fight and destroy.

Vampires are corpses reanimated by magic and living off human blood. They have many powers, but also a number of weaknesses.

Zombies are also reanimated corpses, but mindless. They serve necromancers who call them back from the grave. They're not too tough, but they keep on coming back for more until they are completely destroyed by fire or something similar.

Magical Adventures

Players don't necessarily need magical heroes to embark on magical adventures. Magic is everywhere in the Marvel Universe. Players can run magical heroes like Dr. Strange, Shaman, or Brother Voodoo, or heroes like the Avengers or the X-Men can mix it up with demons and evil sorcerers for a change of pace. Dr. Strange is a great way of getting a group of disparate heroes together, like he did with the Defenders, to help the Sorcerer Supreme deal with a magical threat to Earth. There's also the possibility of a group of players all running novice magicians, possibly students of Dr. Strange, as the X-Men were students of Professor X.

Here are several ideas to get you started with your magical adventures:

★ A two-bit sorcerer gets his hands on a magical item that grants him power to rival that of the Sorcerer Supreme. The mage uses his newfound magic to banish all good magicians from the Earth into another dimension, perhaps the Domain of the Mindless Ones. The magical heroes have to figure out how to survive and get back to Earth, while other heroes fight the evil mage without the aid of magic.

★ Dr. Strange's mansion is full of twisting corridors, hidden rooms, and various powerful magical items. When the good doctor disappears into the

Playing a Mage

A student of the mystic arts, whether a mere novice or an experienced master, has considerable responsibilities compared to the average hero. Mages have a sacred trust to use their powers responsibly, for the good of all. Those who violate this trust are drawn to evil and might suffer a change in Calling. Magicians must be vigilant against various magical threats: cults, evil mages, magical creatures, and dimensional conquerors seeking to use the power of magic for their own ends.

Mages operate in a world that's weird even by the flexible standards of the Marvel Universe. Heroes tackle alien invasions, megalomaniacal scientists, and mutant terrorists without batting an eye, but mages have to handle sanity-bending dimensions, creatures out of myth and legend, and cosmic beings that rule entire universes. On the other hand, magicians have the power to do it. It's not an easy job, and outsiders often don't understand what it takes.

Magician heroes can often be occupied dealing with magical threats, while other heroes handle the physical stuff. For example, while Dr. Strange goes spell-to-spell with Baron Mordo or Dormammu, other heroes can take on hordes of demons, cultists, or Mindless Ones. Mages often need a little help with the physical side of things, and even the Sorcerer Supreme can be taken out with a well-placed shot or a grappling attack that keeps him from casting spells.

Playing a mage is a great opportunity to ham things up. Mages—even the heroic ones—tend to be pompous and long-winded. They're prone to speeches and dramatic dialog, to say nothing of the spells. Mages turn out rhyming tongue-twisters about the Many Moons of Munnopor and the Roving Rings of Raggadorr at the drop of a hat. Narrators should encourage players of mage heroes to make up their own spells, using the names from this article and the Marvel comics. It's lots more fun to say "Evil now be held back, by the Crimson Bands of Cyttorak!" than to tell the Narrator, "I cast Ensnarement on the villain." A player who comes up with a cool incantation that wows the group should definitely receive a bonus on that spell!

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The Slime Wizard

Dirty, nasty, icky, slimy, gummy, stinky, gnarly ...

by Lloyd Brown III

illustrated by Eric Peterson

VOLHOM THE SLIME WIZARD IS AN ENIGMATIC figure. Stories hold that he is happiest when standing in a cramped back alley of Erelhei-Cinlu, bribing a drow matron into selling him a *tentacle rod*. Short of that joy, he might slither through the Underdark on the back of a giant slug in search of a new mold or fungus. At home, he crouches amid a court of slimes and jellies that would make Juiblex proud.

Volhom's weird lore is stored in twin tomes that share a dark brown, mottled pattern. The books have a textured look like high-quality leather, but they have a greasy feel that cannot be wiped off. The covers are uniformly made of this material, including three thick straps that hold each book closed. Volhom's name appears on the front of each in small, uneven print.

The pages are tan to bone-white and very worn. The ink is a glistening, shiny black that looks like it was just set to the page. No illuminations enhance the drab tome. Without knowledge of its precious contents, a reader might discard it as worthless.

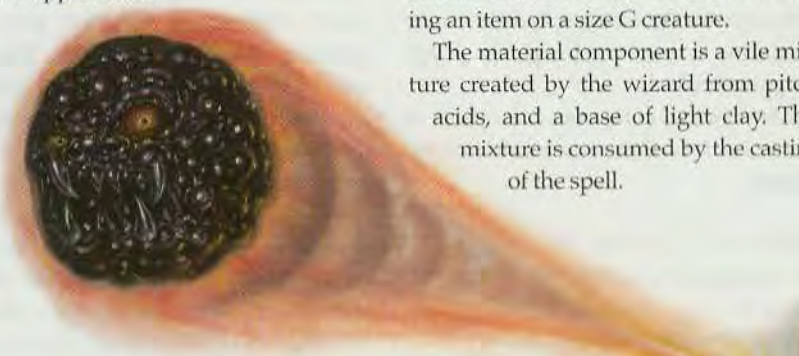
The common spells in Volhom's tomes come from all schools and display the unexpected diversity of Volhom's seemingly specialized interest. Themes include amorphous creatures, darkness, confusion, tentacled creatures, tentacles without creatures, and the decay of all things. Some spells bestow supernumerary appendages on the caster. Some spells create slimy creatures, and some hide or disguise normal things as hideous monstrosities. One or two seek to establish control over slimy creatures. Suffocation, weakness, rot, and acid are common themes as well.

Known spells in the tomes include *grease; darkness 15' radius, Maximillian's earthen grasp* (*Tome of Magic*), *Melf's acid arrow* (although under a different name), *Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter, wall of gloom* (*Spells & Magic*), *web; babble* (a variant reverse of the *tongues* spell), *Maximillian's stony grasp* (*Tome of Magic*), *protection from amorphs* (*Spells & Magic*), *snapping teeth* (*Complete Wizard's Handbook*), *solvent of corrosion* (*Spells & Magic*); *confusion, Evard's black tentacles, plant growth, polymorph other, shadow monsters, vitriolic sphere* (*Spells & Magic*); *chaos, demi-shadow monsters, nightmare* (the reverse of the *dream* spell), *transmute rock to mud; mirage arcana, repulsion, shades, tentacles* (*Complete Wizard's Handbook*), *veil, charm plants, descent into madness* (*Spells & Magic*); *antipathy, defoliate*, and *sink*.

Dormancy

(Alteration)
Level: 1
Range: 10 yards/level
Components: V
Duration: 1d4 turns
Casting Time: 1
Area of Effect: 30' cube
Saving Throw: Negates

Dormancy causes green or olive slime to "sleep" for 1d4 turns, ignoring the sensory triggers that normally cause it to drop on passing creatures. The slime "awakens" instantly if fire or extreme cold is applied to it.



Drop of Slime

(Invocation/Evocation)
Level: 2
Range: 10 yards/level
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 2
Area of Effect: One target
Saving Throw: Special

The *drop of slime* is a black, sticky sphere that strikes a target using the caster's THAC0. The target may count only Dexterity and magical modifiers, not physical armor, for determining AC. The *drop of slime* splashes over the target's body, sticking to possessions, limbs, weapons, and armor. The slime is acidic and eats away at leather, metal, or wooden possessions and skin, inflicting 1 point of damage every round (a successful saving throw vs. poison indicating no damage each round). Most clothing is destroyed after only 2–4 points of damage, padded or leather armor is totally gone after losing 8–10 hp, and metal armor loses 1 point of AC value for each 5 hp lost.

The slime can be removed by 5 gallons of any oil within a single round; lamp oil works fine, but Greek fire takes an extra round. The slime is also flammable and may be burned off, although the flame inflicts 4d4 points of damage to the target and his possessions in the process. A successful *dispel magic* removes it immediately.

Although the *drop of slime* damages any size creature, a single *drop* is enough to cover the possessions of a size M creature. If a larger creature is hit, not all of its possessions are affected. Assume a drop has a 50% chance of affecting any particular item held by a size L creature, a 25% chance of affecting an item held by a size H creature, and a 10% chance of touching an item on a size G creature.

The material component is a vile mixture created by the wizard from pitch, acids, and a base of light clay. This mixture is consumed by the casting of the spell.

Slippery Skin

(Alteration)
Level: 1
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 turn/level
Casting Time: 1
Area of Effect: One target
Saving Throw: None

The creature affected by *slippery skin* exudes a slippery chemical that quickly coats both skin and clothing. Attempts to grapple or constrict the creature are made at a –4 penalty. Attacks affected by the spell include those of constrictor snakes, wrestling PCs, trappers, lurkers above, and other creatures or magical items (such as a *rope of constriction*) that attempt to bind or constrain the creature. Saving throws or Dexterity checks for avoiding entrapment are made at a +4 (or +20%) bonus. The character also gains a +4 (+20%) bonus to escape from bonds or shackles or to squeeze through tight places.

The material component is a piece of skin from any amphibian. It is consumed in the casting.

Resist Slime

(Abjuration)
Level: 2
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 turn/level
Casting Time: 2
Area of Effect: One target
Saving Throw: None

The subject of *resist slime* is better able to defend against amorphous creatures. Creatures that exude a corrosive acid (such as ochre jelly, gray ooze, and related creatures) find that the target's skin is tougher to dissolve than expected. The target's AC when being attacked by these creatures is considered 4 points better, and any saving throws made against their attacks are improved by +2.

Anyone affected by the spell essentially feels an extra layer of skin over his or her own. The target's own skin itches and burns underneath the mystical

coating. While the effect is certainly preferable to being dissolved by acid, many people are unwilling to subject themselves to it often. The itching causes no loss of hit points or ability scores, but it might make the target irritable.

The material component is a tiny glass shield, which can be reused.

Spore Cone

(Invocation/Evocation)
Level: 3
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Instantaneous
Casting Time: 3
Area of Effect: 60' long × 20' wide cone
Saving Throw: 1/2

The *spore cone* resembles the attack of certain moldy creatures. When the spell is cast thousands of tiny seedlike spores shoot through the air at high speed, inflicting 1d4 points of damage per caster level. Creatures caught in the spell's effect must also make a successful saving throw vs. spell or spend the next 2 rounds clearing the spores from their eyes and throat. Any creature killed (that is, reduced to 0 hp and not *raised* or *resurrected*) by the *spore cone* becomes a host and sprouts yellow mold after 3d6 days, negating any chance to *raise* the creature. A creature that fails its saving throw vs. the spell dies 2d8 days later and hosts a new mold 5d6 days after death. A *cure disease* spell removes the spores from the dead creature's body if cast before the mold sprouts. Nonbreathing creatures or creatures with AC 0 or better suffer half or one-quarter damage from the spell. Constructs and creatures composed of inorganic matter (like skeletons, earth elementals, and iron golems) are unharmed by this spell.

The material component is a spore from a gas spore or yellow or brown mold, which is consumed in the casting.

Transmute Slime to Rock

(Alteration)
Level: 3
Range: 30 yards
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 2
Area of Effect: One creature
Saving Throw: Negates

This spell is a quick defense used against any amorphous creature. The spell temporarily turns any slime, pudding, ooze, jelly, or other amorphous creature into plain stone. The caster may then prepare other methods for destroying the creature, move it to a position where it can be used against his enemies, or calmly avoid the creature.

The target must make a saving throw vs. petrification to avoid being turned to stone, and it must make a System Shock roll to survive being turned back to its original material. If the DM does not wish to choose or generate a Constitution score for the creature, he or she may substitute a saving throw vs. death magic instead.

The material component is a piece of hardened lava that is consumed in the casting.

Volhom's Minute Missiles

(Invocation/Evocation)
Level: 3
Range: 60 yards + 10 yards/level
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 3
Area of Effect: One target per missile
Saving Throw: None

This spell was inspired by a fascination with the *Melf's minute meteors* spell and adapted to Volhom's unique outlook. The spell utilizes a small silver wand (valued at 100 gp and reusable) to fire small balls of acid. Unlike *minute meteors*, the caster may not choose the rate of fire; he or she may fire only one per round. The spell creates one ball/level, each striking for 1d4 points of damage on the first round and 1 point of damage on the second round. The caster uses his own THAC0 when firing the *missiles*.

The *missiles* also damage items struck. A single *missile* might destroy a piece of crockery, item of jewelry, book, article of clothing, or other small, light object. More *missiles* might damage weapons, armor, doors, furnishings, or larger objects. If the DM believes that enough *missiles* have hit the item, he or she should require it to make a successful saving throw vs. acid or be destroyed.

The material component is the silver wand, which can be reused.

Slime Guardian

(Conjuration/Summoning)
Level: 4
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 2 rounds/level
Casting Time: 4
Area of Effect: The caster
Saving Throw: None

When a wizard casts *slime guardian*, his or her skin and clothing begin to glisten with a chromatic sheen, like a soap bubble in the sun. The wizard is actually covered by a symbiotic slime creature, protecting him or her from any touch attacks and reducing physical damage from weapons or natural attacks by 1 point. Any touch attacks aimed at the caster affect the slime instead, including level drains from undead, the petrifying touch of a cockatrice, and touch-dependent spells such as *shocking grasp*. The *guardian* is considered to have 1 hp per level of the caster and 1 HD for every three caster levels. If it suffers the effects of petrification or similar life-destroying effects, it crumbles away from the caster, its benefits negated. Note that the *slime guardian* does not protect against *disintegrate* and other such deadly area-effect spells.

If the *guardian* is killed, it disappears. Otherwise, it cannot be removed unless the spell is dispelled. Area of effect spells might destroy the slime creature prematurely, although if the caster is subjected to an area spell and makes his or her saving throw, the *guardian* is assumed to save also.

The material component is a small jar of ointment that the caster must prepare personally. The costs for the ointment range from 50–80 gp. A new jar must be prepared for each casting of the spell.

Volhom's Tentacle Arms

(Alteration)
Level: 4
Range: Caster only
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting Time: 4
Area of Effect: The caster
Saving Throw: None

The *tentacle arms* spell allows the caster to choose from one of three effects;

the caster must choose the effect when memorizing the spell.

The first and most common effect turns the caster's arms into 6'-long tentacles similar to those found on an otyugh. The tentacles have rough edges capable of inflicting 2d4 points of damage per strike. For purposes of manipulation, grappling, or feats of strength, the tentacles have Strength 17.

A second variation turns the caster's arms into long, snaky tentacles of low strength (Strength 8) but high coordination (Dexterity 16). The caster may manipulate objects up to 10 feet away with great precision. These tentacles do not cause damage on any strike, but they can wield weapons. The caster could use them to effectively grapple, however, with +2 on any attack rolls.

The third option turns the caster's arms into 8'-long tentacles that sometimes move on their own if the caster is not careful. These clumsy appendages may strike a target with little force, but their touch causes a target to move at half speed (as a *slow* spell) for 2d6 rounds unless the creature touched makes a saving throw vs. paralyzation. Since they are fairly thick and substantial, however, the caster may also effectively overbear targets with them, making overbearing attacks at +1.

Regardless of the variation used, while the spell is in effect the caster cannot cast spells with somatic components. Unlike the 6th-level spell *tentacles*, these appendages are the caster's own arms; if they are severed, the caster's arms are similarly damaged when the spell ends. Attacks directed at the tentacles reduce the caster's hit points normally. Also unlike the higher-level spell, the caster may not cause constricting damage.

Wall of Gel

(Invocation/Evocation)
Level: 4
Range: 60 yards
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 turn/level
Casting Time: 4
Area of Effect: One 10' × 10' × 2' section of wall per level
Saving Throw: None

A *wall of gel* creates a transparent, permeable wall that protects against winds and gases. It offers some protection against missile weapons (any that pass through suffer a –2 penalty on attacks) and spells. (Evocation spells such as *fireball* and *lightning bolt* do not penetrate it but might destroy it.) The *wall* affects creatures attempting to pass through it as well. Any creatures touching the *wall* must make a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation or be unable to move, attack, defend, or take any other action for 1d4 turns. Any creature walking through the *wall* saves at a –2 penalty.

Each section is considered AC 8 and is considered destroyed if it suffers 24 points of damage. Sections can be destroyed without affecting other sections, so the *wall* may suffer "gaps" and still stand.

If the caster so chooses when casting the spell, he or she may opt to mentally cause the *wall* to move at MV 1, although this option reduces the duration to 1 round per level. Since the depth of the *wall* is hard to determine from either side, enemies might think that the caster is driving a gelatinous cube before him.

The material component is a square of clear glass, which may be reused.

Gelatinous Form

(Alteration)
Level: 5
Range: 0
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 turn/3 levels
Casting Time: 5
Area of Effect: The caster
Saving Throw: None

When this spell is cast, the wizard's composition changes to that of a fluid

gelatin. The caster may keep his or her own form, change form to any other creature the same size, or become a shapeless blob. Each change requires one round of concentration and can be disrupted as spellcasting (although the caster can make another attempt on the next round). The caster cannot duplicate an individual. In fact, the race of the desired form can barely be discerned; only the general shape with regard to limbs and appendages. In the shapeless blob form, the caster moves as a black pudding, with the ability to creep under doors or through small cracks. The caster cannot mimic the magical properties of any creatures. He can strike as a black pudding (by extending a blunt pseudopod), but the damage is only 1d2 points.

While this spell is in effect, the caster suffers one less point of damage from any weapons or natural attacks, since his resilient body absorbs some of the strike. The caster is unable to cast spells except in his or her natural shape.

Toxic Snare

(Conjuration/Summoning)
Level: 5
Range: 30 yards
Components: V, S
Duration: Special
Casting Time: 5
Area of Effect: One creature
Saving Throw: None

Toxic snare causes a slimy outer skin to appear around the subject. The coating covers most of the subject's body, although the subject can still breathe and otherwise function normally. The *toxic snare* is a symbiotic creature that lives on toxins that would kill most humans. If the subject is poisoned, the *toxic snare* sucks at the subject's blood through the skin, causing 1d4 points of damage each round. As it takes blood, however, it also absorbs poison, allowing a new saving throw each round until the target dies from blood loss, the poison is gone (indicated by a successful saving throw against the poison), or the *toxic snare* itself is killed or dispelled.

The creature has ½ HD (1d4 hp) and can be damaged by magic, spells that affect amorphous creatures, or magical weapons. Attacking the *toxic snare* while it is on a host damages both the host and the *toxic snare* equally.

If the *toxic snare* is cast upon a subject that does not have poison in its bloodstream (such as a creature who has taken ingested poison, a creature that creates poison, or a creature without blood), it falls off in one round and is dispelled.

The *toxic snare* can coat only creatures of size M or smaller.

Slime Growth

(Alteration)
Level: 5
Range: 5 yards/level
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 round/2 levels
Casting Time: 5
Area of Effect: One amorphous creature
Saving Throw: None

Slime growth causes an amorphous creature to double in size, affecting Hit Dice and hit points but not necessarily damage. Creatures that strike with a pseudopod do not benefit from additional damage. Creatures that attack by enveloping or touching an enemy with as much of their bodies as possible (such as green slimes) cause double damage. In either event, the increase in Hit Dice does not increase the creature's THAC0.

At the end of the spell's duration, the creature reverts to its original size. Damage inflicted on the creature remains, however, and might be sufficient to kill it outright if the damage exceeds the creature's original hit point total.

Last Generation

(Alteration)
Level: 6
Range: 10 yards/level
Components: V, S
Duration: Permanent
Casting Time: 6
Area of Effect: 30' cube
Saving Throw: Negates

This spell renders all plant life within the area of effect incapable of reproduction. This spell thus renders harmless dangerous molds and fungi such as yellow mold or gas spores. Trees, bushes, vines, and other plants do not produce any fruit or flowers. Grassy areas usually become desolate for a short time afterward, as the current generation dies and is not replaced. The spell does not affect the hit points of plant creatures but does render them sterile.

The spell does not affect animals. However, any animals in the area of effect instinctively understand the spell's general purpose and might feel that they somehow dodged or avoided the effects. Unless the caster carefully explains the spell's effects, some of these creatures might become quite angry!

Summon Handmaiden

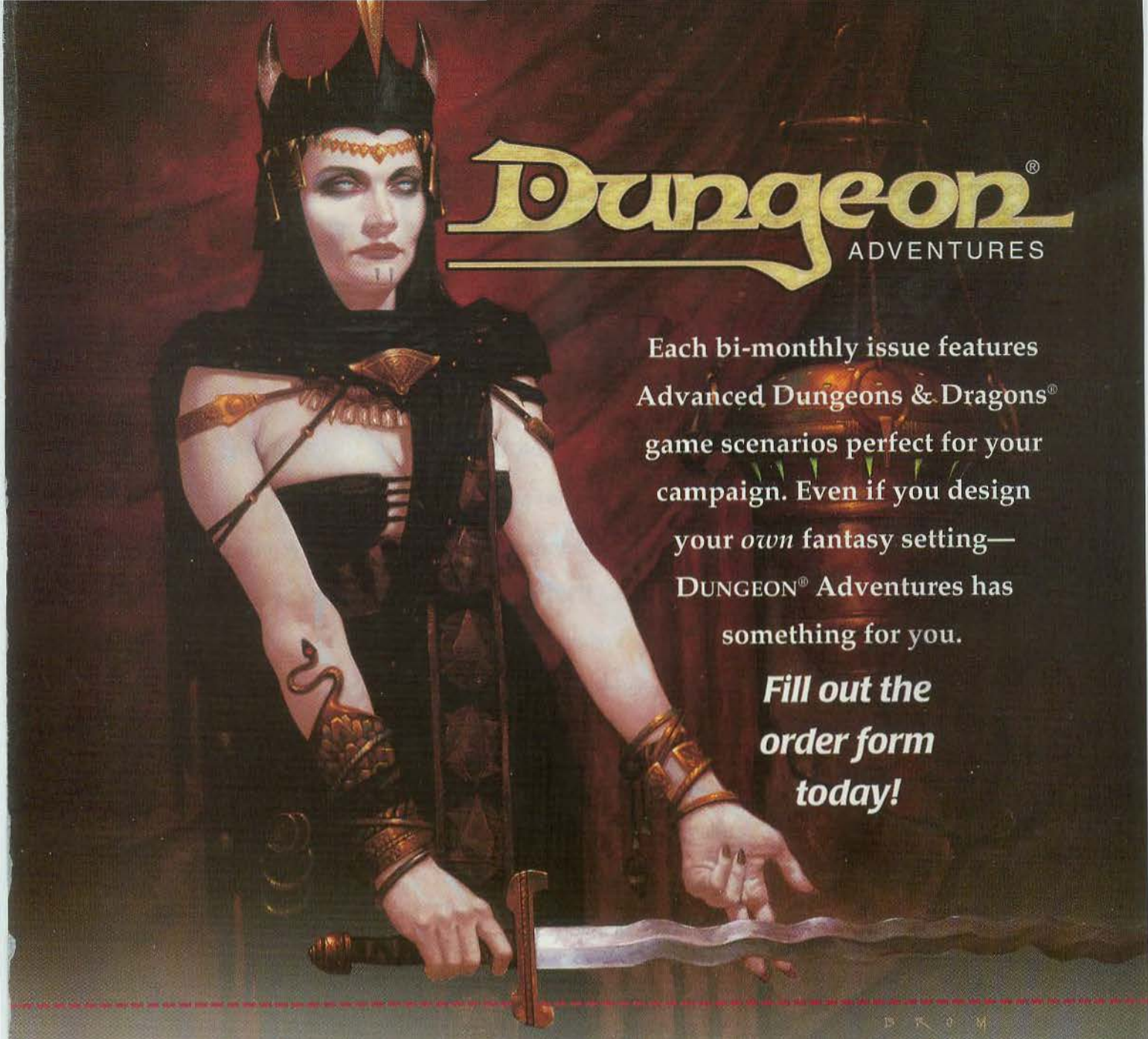
(Conjuration/Summoning)
Level: 7
Range: 30 yards
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 1 turn
Casting Time: 1 round
Area of Effect: One yochlol
Saving Throw: None

This spell calls upon one of the handmaidens of Lolth for advice, aid, or combat. The handmaiden always answers the call, and she brings additional aid. Only a single yochlol is forced to serve the summoning wizard; other creatures (or additional yochlol) may act as they wish. Subservient creatures generally obey the yochlol; additional yochlol may aid the summoned handmaiden or oppose her. They are chaotic creatures, after all. The exact summons is determined by rolling percentile dice. If desired, the caster can add his or her level to the dice roll, but the caster must make this decision before the dice are rolled.

1d100	Result
01–20	1 yochlol
21–35	1 yochlol and 3d10 normal spiders
36–60	1 yochlol and 1d4+1 large spiders
61–75	1 yochlol and 1d4 huge spiders
76–90	1 yochlol and 1d3 giant spiders
91+	1d3 yochlol

The material component is a spider web created by either a phase spider or a yochlol in spider form. The web is consumed by the spell's casting.

Lloyd Brown is not a slimy little wizard, despite what you might have heard.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DMDA98

The Bare Necessities

Don't leave home without these useful if not terribly powerful magical items.

by
Jeremy Johannesen

illustrated by
Ryan Barger

MANY EXPERIENCED GAMERS KNOW THAT THE BEST magical items are not those that allow the player characters to vanquish their foes in a single round but the much less powerful items that lead the players to use their heads and engage in great roleplaying. Perhaps a better judge of an item's value would be how useful it is rather than how much it can allow a character to destroy.

Any seasoned DM can attest that there are few items for low-level characters that do not upset the balance of the game. How many times can a player get excited over a *sword +1*? Below are a few low-power magical items designed to help meet the basic needs of all characters, as well as provide the opportunity for some interesting roleplaying.

Moonwater Gourd

This item appears to be a normal *gourd*, dried and prepared for use as a canteen. The skin of the *gourd* is intricately decorated with interwoven patterns and runes. Inside the *gourd* is a small amount of water and three smooth, polished stones, each with runes carved into them.

Each night the *gourd* refills itself with fresh water up to its full capacity. When full, the *gourd* holds one gallon of water. The container continues to refill itself each night provided that the top is sealed in place. A small amount of water (about one ounce) must always remain within the *gourd*, as must the three stones. If all of the water or any of the three stones are removed from the *gourd*, its powers are lost. Additionally, if any other liquid besides water is placed into the *gourd*, its magical properties are lost. A *moonwater gourd* that has lost its magical ability becomes brittle and crumbles. This item gives off no magical aura.

XP Value: 250 **GP Value:** 100

Water Seeds

These "seeds" appear to be ordinary stones, found in groups of nine. Each stone is roughly the size of a large, flattened grape. One side of each stone is inscribed with a small rune, each one unique. *Water seeds* are usually found in a small pouch made from oil cloth and always feel cold to the touch.

Water seeds can be used to create a natural spring in any location. The water that comes from this spring is always perfectly pure, crystal clear, and very cold (40° F). To utilize the *water seeds*, the user must perform a number of careful steps. First, a circular hole must be dug, no less than 3 feet deep and 3 feet across. Next, the *water seeds* must be placed in the bottom of this hole, arranged into a circle around the inside edge, with the carved runes facing down. In the center

of this circle the user must pour three gallons of clean water. The hole must then be filled again, leaving the stones in place. Finally, a smaller hole, 1 foot in diameter and 1 foot deep, must be made in the center of this covered plot. The smaller hole should be lined with rocks of any kind, though this is not necessary for the seeds to work. After a time, cold, pure water begins to bubble from the ground, filling the small stone-lined hole. The water continues to flow at a rate of three gallons per minute, gurgling up into the air about a foot high, until the *seeds* are removed. To determine how long it takes for the water to begin flowing, first determine the depth of the source equal to 1d4 × 100 feet. It takes 1 round per 10 feet for the water to reach the surface.

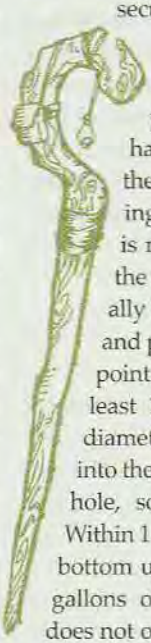
Besides attracting water to the surface, the *water seeds* also tend to lure aquatic creatures. The creatures attracted by the *water seeds* always remain below the surface, enjoying the water, and never venture to the surface. Most often a nereid (30%), a water weird (30%), or water elemental vermin, A.K.A a spitter (40%; see the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® *Annual Volume One*) make their homes in the waters beneath the surface of the spring. For each month that the *water seeds* are in place, there is a noncumulative, 20% chance that a water creature makes its home in the spring. Only one creature lives in the spring at a time.

Removing the *water seeds* once they are in place and the spring has begun flowing is a difficult task. Anyone wishing to reclaim *water seeds* would need to begin by digging anywhere within the 3 foot radius of the spring, where the *seeds* are buried. The deeper one digs, the wetter the ground becomes, with thick mud, clay and standing water roughly 2 feet below the surface. This disturbance is bound to attract the attention of any creature that has made its home around the spring. This creature attacks to protect the *water seeds*. If any of the nine *water seeds* is removed from its place, the flow of water immediately stops. The stoppage of the water incurs the wrath of the creature living in the spring, as well as that of any surface dwellers benefiting from the water.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 2,000

Water Witching Staff

A *water witching staff* looks like an ordinary oak walking stick. It stands nearly 5 feet high, with a half circle curvature at the top. A cord is attached to the *staff* near the top. At the end of the cord is a small polished stone. The stone is deep blue and has a bulbous end. It is secured inside a leather pouch.



The *staff* is used by taking the blue stone out of the pouch and allowing it to hang from the cord. The stone then swings, primarily pointing in one direction. If the *staff* is moved in the direction that the stone is swinging, eventually (1d8 rounds) the stone stops and points straight down. At this point the user must dig a hole at least 1 foot deep and 1 foot in diameter. Next, the *staff* is forced into the ground at the bottom of the hole, so that it stands upright. Within 1 turn the hole fills, from the bottom up, with a maximum of 50 gallons of pure water. The water does not overflow the hole, nor does it rise above the top of the *staff*. Thus, the smaller the hole, the less water is produced.

Once the water is taken from the hole it does not fill again, becoming a normal, dry hole. A *witching staff* does not find water in exactly the same place twice, though it might find water only a few feet away from a previous hole. The *staff* operates only with the stone and *staff* together. If the cord is severed, the enchantment is lost.

XP Value: 500 **GP Value:** 1,000

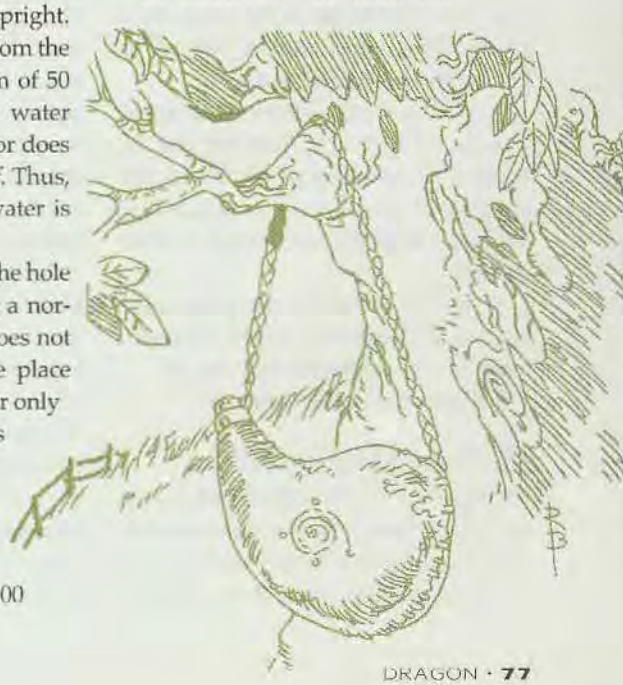
Sweet Bladder

This item appears as a normal water bladder or wine skin. A *sweet bladder* is always made of soft leather, with a finely crafted silver spout. When completely full, the bladder holds one half gallon of liquid. Most often there is a woven leather strap accompanying the *bladder*.

A *sweet bladder* is a valuable item to any traveling adventurer. To utilize the *bladder*, one must fill it with ordinary water and leave it to sit over night. After at least 12 hours, the water undergoes a startling transformation, leaving the *sweet bladder* filled with a heavy, rich cream that is quite sweet and delicious, as well as extremely nourishing. A man-sized creature can survive solely on the sweet cream, provided it consumes the entire volume each day.

Further, if the sweet cream is added to a normal diet, its effects are equally positive. Any creature that consumes one quart of sweet cream in addition to its normal diet heals at an increased rate. This rate is equal to 1–2 hit points per quart consumed. Once the *bladder* is filled with water and the sweet cream has formed, it must be emptied within 48 hours or the cream sours and the *bladder* loses its enchantment. Sweet cream loses its magical properties within 10 minutes of being poured from the *bladder*. If the *bladder* is filled with any liquid besides water, it loses its magical properties. An empty *bladder* can be stored indefinitely, retaining its powers.

XP Value: 700 **GP Value:** 500



Stone Cheese

This item appears as a 2" diameter, 1 inch thick disc. It is pale yellow, as hard as a rock, and has only the faintest odor of cheese.

Stone cheese is prepared through a secret, time-consuming method. What makes the *cheese* so useful is that it never spoils. When needed, the *cheese* must be submerged in boiling water for one half hour, after which the *cheese* swells to 14 inches in diameter and 5 inches thick. It tastes completely fresh, much like sharp cheddar. Once it has been soaked, the *cheese* remains fresh for 1 week before becoming inedible.

XP Value: 25 per disk or 500 for recipe
GP Value: 10 gp each

Everloaf

An *everloaf* is, to all appearances, a completely mundane loaf of bread. Found in assorted shapes and sizes, the *loaf* is most commonly oblong and about 9 inches long. Often the top of the *loaf* has been detailed with a braided design.

This enchanted bread is a valued item for any adventurer. *Everloaf* has a few important enchantments.

First, it always remains perfectly fresh, as if it were just baked.

Second, the bread can be broken into pieces, provided that at least one half of the *loaf* is left intact as a single piece. The *loaf* then regenerates the missing pieces in 1 hour. The smaller pieces become normal perfectly fresh bread. If the *loaf* is ever cut with a knife, or the entire *loaf* is broken into small pieces, all of its enchantment is forever lost.

To use the bread's third enchantment, a piece must be torn from the *loaf*. By pouring a liquid through the bread, any impurities or poison can be detected, as the bread instantly turns black in their presence.

Everloaf is found in many varieties, and the enchantment can be bestowed upon any type of fresh bread dough.

XP Value: 500 **GP Value:** 350

Satchel of Nourishment

Useful to any creature that needs to eat, this item appears as a common canvas sack, roughly 8 inches by 14 inches, with a strong carrying strap. It is usually a pale brown color and is always in good condition, with no tears or holes.

Each day the *satchel* magically produces enough food to provide for one human-sized creature. The food always takes the form of a fresh roll, a sizeable piece of dried meat, and three pieces of fruit. If the food is not removed, no more is produced. Further, if only a portion of the food is removed, only that portion is replaced. If food is left in the *satchel* half eaten, it will not be replaced. It takes 14 hours for the sack to replenish the missing food. The *satchel* continues to produce food as long as at least one item is removed each day, and the sack remains intact. Although tough, the canvas can be torn, thus destroying the *satchel's* properties.

XP Value: 350 **GP Value:** 250

Centurybloom Tree

A *centurybloom* is encountered in one of two forms. The first is a large seed, resembling a giant cherry pit. The second form is a small tree standing roughly 10 feet tall, with rough bark and a clustering of limbs at the top quarter of its height. The bark is deep brown, and the leaves are wedge-shaped and reddish green. There are always small, crimson, pear-shaped fruit on the *tree*.

Centurybloom seeds are usually found in multiples of three, never more than twelve. The seeds remain viable indefinitely and can be planted at any time of year. Planting the seeds requires minimal effort; they need only to be covered in loose soil and watered with at least three gallons of water. A sprout emerges from the soil after about one week. The tree grows quickly, reaching a height of three feet after only two months. At this point, the *tree* begins to produce fruit. It continues to grow until it reaches its full height after roughly one year.

The value of the *centurybloom* is the exceptional rate at which it generates fruit. A full-grown *tree* produces a bushel of fruit every month; roughly ninety pieces of fruit, which can be harvested at a constant rate of three pieces per day. The fruit is very sweet and readily used in baking.

Besides its amazing yield of fruit, the *tree* also requires very little maintenance. It can thrive in extremely harsh conditions. Even in awful growing conditions, the *tree* continues to produce a bounty of fruit. The tree can withstand many physical hardships including insects, parasites, and minor fires. The *tree* is completely vulnerable to normal assault from any sword or ax.

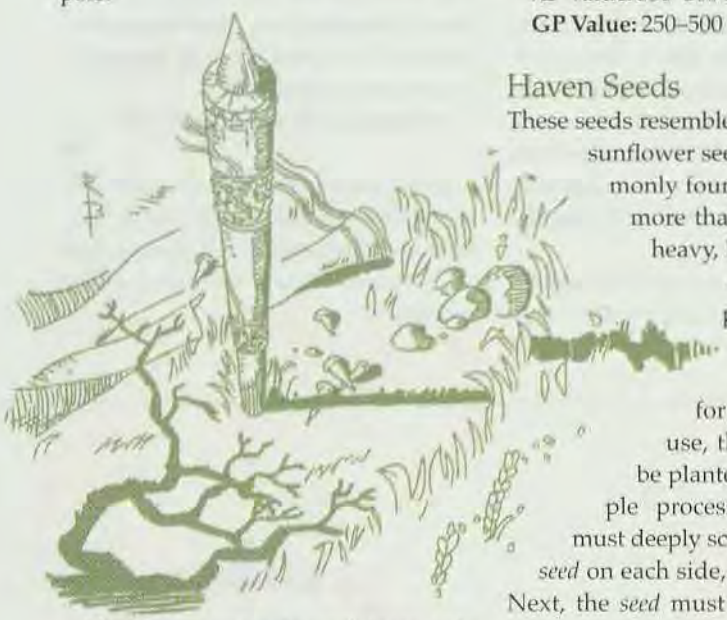
After precisely one hundred years of continuous blooming, the tree produces one seed and dies. In some rare instances a *centurybloom* produces two seeds. The seeds of the *centurybloom* are not found in the fruit, as in most fruit-bearing plants. Instead the seed slowly develops in the ground just beneath the base of the *tree*. The seed must be dug up from the base of the tree and carefully removed. Once removed, the seed can be stored until the user is ready to plant it.

The only drawback to the *tree* is that as an easy and abundant food source it attracts numerous creatures that seek to feed. Often the trees are tended and protected by the creatures who planted them, who view *centuryblooms* as sacred and try to drive off unwanted intruders. The seeds that the *trees* eventually produce are equally protected.

XP Value: 5 per fruit, 400 per seed
GP Value: 500/seed

Tent Ribs

This item is a solid wooden tent pole decorated with delicately carved runes. The pole is roughly 8 feet in height and 3 inches in diameter. Included with this pole is a set of tent stakes, numbering at least four and as many as eight. The stakes are found in a heavy canvas sack that is wrapped around and tied to the pole.



This item reveals its usefulness only after it is used for its standard purpose. The tent can be pitched using any material for the sides: canvas, hides, furs, etc. Once the walls are fully set and the tent stakes are put into place, the item is activated. The stakes create a perimeter of effect for the item. Within the tent the temperature always remains a constant 68° F, regardless of external conditions, even in the greatest extremes. Additionally, all wind ceases within the tent, and the air remains perfectly calm. Furthermore, the tent repels all precipitation, remaining completely dry, and no snow accumulates on the top of the tent.

There are several variations of this item, found in assorted sizes and shapes. Smaller poles are designed to be bent, creating a small one- or two-person tent. Other extremely large varieties can be used to create tents that can sleep as many as twenty men. Regardless of size, the tent's magic remains the same.

The tent's enchantment is created by the central pole and the stakes. The central tent pole can withstand all surface damage, including fire or cuts, but if the item is broken in two, its powers are lost. Additionally, the tent stakes must remain intact as a complete set. If any of the stakes are lost, the item does not function.

XP Value: 350–500 by size
GP Value: 250–500 by size

Haven Seeds

These seeds resemble giant, 6"-long red sunflower seeds. They are commonly found in groups of no more than five and have a heavy, leathery shell with a natural rune-like patterning.

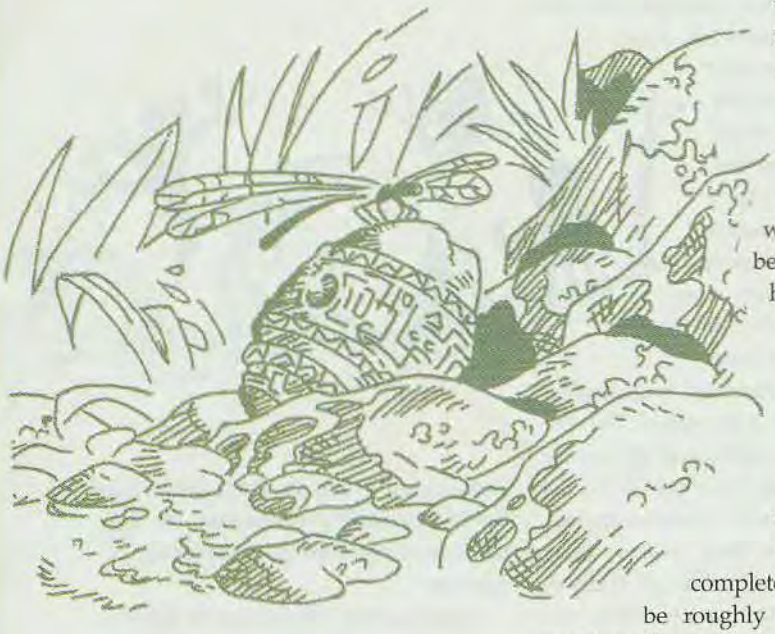
Haven seeds provide shelter for travelers. Before use, the *seeds* must first be planted, which is a simple process. First the user must deeply score the surface of a *seed* on each side, thus activating it. Next, the *seed* must be placed on the ground, point up, and watered with at least one gallon of water. This immediately causes the *seed* to begin its life cycle. Almost immediately the *seed* sprouts a heavy stalk that grows only a few inches before forming a large bud. This bud swells at a dramatic rate, falling over under its own weight. After about half an hour of growing, the bud reaches 6 feet in diameter, and the outer skin of the bud changes to a hard shell. The end of the plant's growth is obvious when the bud splits, forming an opening near its base. The total size that the bud reaches is determined by the amount of water poured upon the *seed*. Each gallon in excess of the first causes the bud to swell 3 feet beyond its original 6'-diameter area to a maximum 21'-diameter.

Once the bud has ceased its growth, the user may enter the shell through the cracked opening. The shell is entirely hollow, and the walls are only about three inches thick. There is a central stalk that runs from the highest point of the roof to the center of the floor. Neither the shell nor the interior of the bud is edible. The shell offers a perfect refuge from weather, as it repels both water and wind.

After entering the shell, the user can carefully remove the new *seed* the haven plant has produced. This is done by cutting into the plant at the base of the central spine to find the new *seed*. Great care must be taken to remove the *seed* without cutting into it, or it is destroyed. Once the central stalk is cut and the new *seed* removed, the entire plant becomes brittle and crumbles after a few days.

The bud and shell produced by the haven plant are only a byproduct of its reproduction cycle. Beneath the ground where a haven plant once stood there is planted a secondary seed. These seeds remain dormant until they receive adequate water to grow. When the seeds are activated, a small vine springs forth from the ground and covers up to an acre with a thorny vine. This plant is useless; its berries cause nausea if eaten, and the vines chokes out other plants in the area. This vine can be overcome only by burning off the area and ripping the vine up by its roots.

XP Value: 150 per seed
GP Value: 75 each



wishes to form the wall. Next, a circle must be laid out on the ground equal to the diameter of the desired wall, which may be as large as one-half mile in diameter. This circle must be created by laying out pebbles and rocks of any size, each one touching the next until the circle is complete. The shape must be roughly circular. In any position where an opening is desired, a smaller circle must be created. The curve of the original circle must bisect any smaller ones. When this is completed, the enchanted stone is put in place, completing the circle at the northeasternmost point. Finally, all of the rocks and pebbles in the circle must be watered until they are completely wet, thus activating the item.

Within 24 hours, the earth springs up around the rocks, creating a wall roughly 3 feet tall and 2 feet wide. In the places where any smaller circles had been created, there remain openings in the wall; the dimension of the openings are determined by the size of the smaller circle. If left undisturbed, the wall continues to grow until it reaches a height of 15 feet and a width of 6 feet. This wall is extremely resilient and can withstand a great deal of damage. Once fully "grown," the wall regenerates damage at a rate of 5 hit points per round. (The wall has 100 hp per 10' × 10' section.)

If a hole is dug into the wall from the inside, at the northeasternmost point, the enchanted rock can be retrieved. Once this is done, the wall no longer regenerates and slowly becomes brittle. After one month, the wall begins to crumble, eventually collapsing into nothing but a pile of loose dirt roughly two months after the stone has been removed. If the stone is returned any time before two months has elapsed, the wall regains its powers and repairs itself.

XP Value: 1,750 **GP Value:** 2,000

Jeremy Johannson and Ryan Barger submitted this article and artwork together, making it one of the very rare instances in which we've accepted art and text from the same submission.

Pebble Wall

When not in use, this item appears as an ordinary rock, usually stored in a leather pouch. It is roughly the size and shape of a large potato, decorated with ornate carvings. Unless the viewer is aware of its powers, the rock seems of little value, but it does radiate a faint magical aura.

To utilize the item, a number of steps must be undertaken. First the user must decide upon a location where he or she

Gamer's Guide

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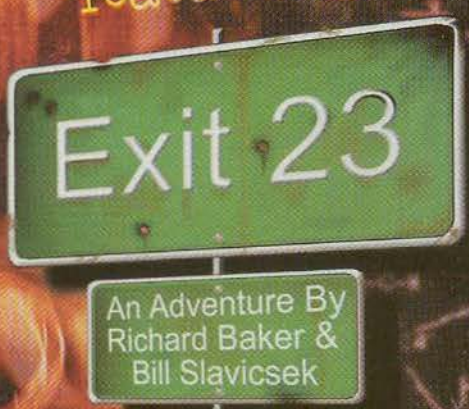

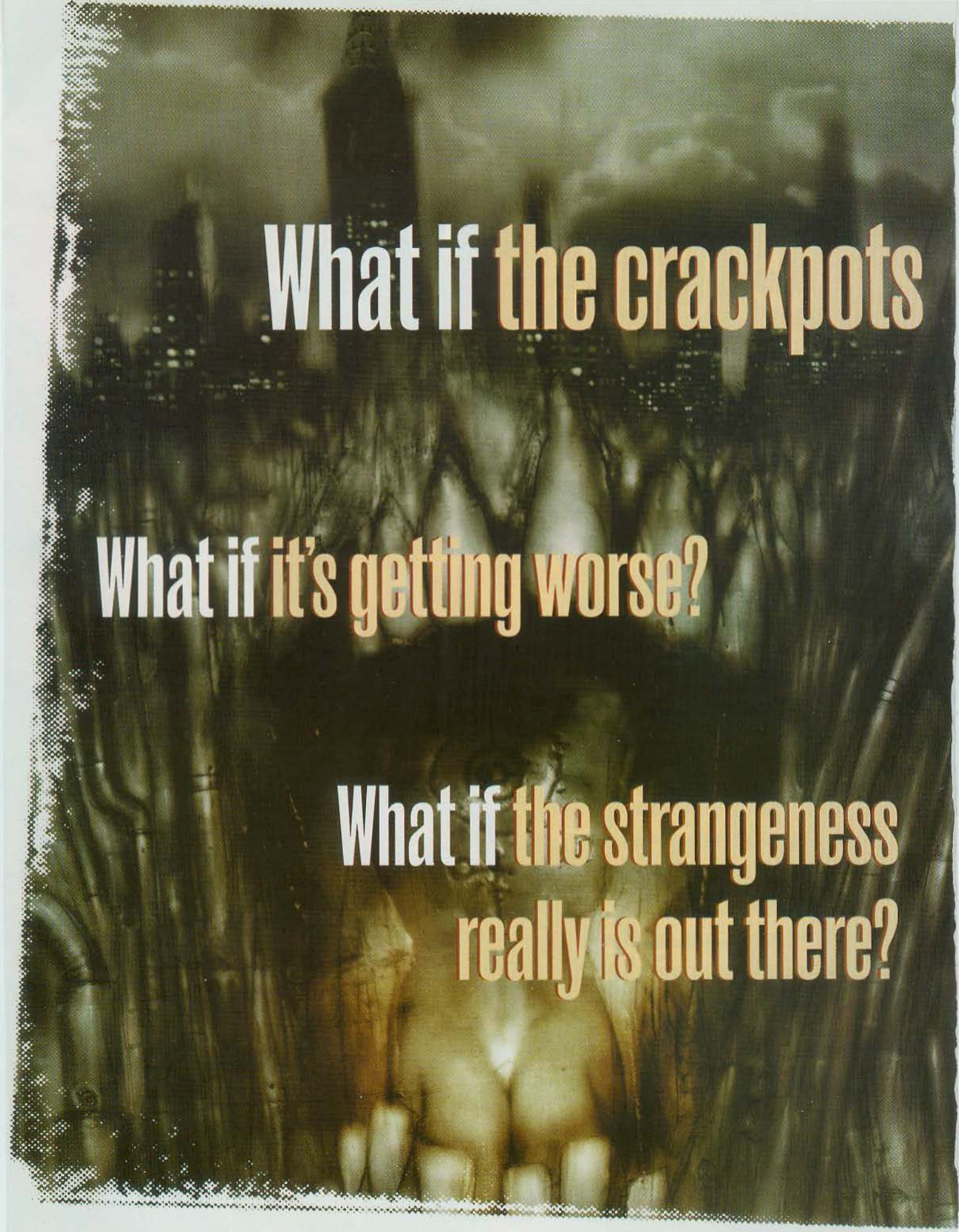
What if the crackpots
What if it's getting worse?
What if the strangeness
really is out there?

WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE SUSPICION HAS DISPLACED TRUST, A world where belief in the strange is replacing belief in the normal. When pressed, most laugh off such claims, or at least ignore the greater implications of such beliefs. But every now and then, something unexplainable occurs—something that

shouldn't have happened the way it did, or that surely can't mean what it seems to suggest. It is at precisely those moments when the facade of comfort drops, and we can't help but wonder:

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A World Like Our Own

The DARK•MATTER campaign setting takes place at the dawn of the twenty-first century. On the surface, Earth appears much the same as it does today. Nations, corporations, and famous individuals are all the same—at least at first glance. The world is as familiar as the one outside your own window, but with subtle twists just beneath the surface.

Of course, that's the whole point. The DARK•MATTER setting isn't about grandiose visions of the future. It's about what you already know—or what you think you know. Strange things lurk at the fringe of societal awareness, and the DARK•MATTER setting falls firmly within that fringe.

The DARK•MATTER campaign setting is a specific world designed for use with the ALTERNITY science fiction roleplaying game. In these pages, you'll find rules to introduce you to the basics of the ALTERNITY science fiction roleplaying game and the DARK•MATTER setting.

Heroes of DARK•MATTER

Unlike many other science fiction roleplaying games, DARK•MATTER heroes are, to a large extent, just like the people around you. They're teachers and police officers, scientists and businessmen, reporters and soldiers. They are otherwise normal individuals who have been awakened to the realities of their world and thrust into decidedly abnormal circumstances.

DARK•MATTER heroes do have one thing in common: the Hoffmann Institute. For reasons perhaps known only to itself, this private organization has sought out the heroes and gathered them together to learn about the growing darkness and, if possible, to stem the tide.

What Is ALTERNITY?

The ALTERNITY science fiction roleplaying game is the game system or set of rules that the DARK•MATTER setting was designed to use. In computer terms, the ALTERNITY rules are the hardware, and the DARK•MATTER setting is the software. While the ALTERNITY game system embraces a variety of science fiction genres, ranging from super-spy technothrillers to far-future space opera, the DARK•MATTER game places you in a more specific role—you're a modern-day ghosthunter, criminologist, conspiracy theorist, or UFOlogist investigating the weird and disturbing world of paranormal events.

Getting Started

Here's what you need to do to start playing:

- Read through the next few pages of the fast-play rules, but stop when you get to the Gamemaster section on page 89.
- Find a few friends to play with. You'll need one person to be the Gamemaster, and anywhere from two to six players to make up heroes and play them in the game.
- Find a set of polyhedral dice—four-sided, six-sided, eight-sided, twelve-sided, and twenty-sided dice. Most hobby stores sell sets of polyhedral dice pretty cheap.
- Find a good place to play. You'll want someplace you can stay for a couple of hours.
- Pick a hero from the hero templates. You can photocopy the hero sheet if you like.
- If you're the Gamemaster, take some time before the game to read the Gamemaster's fast-play rules, beginning with "So You Want to Be the Gamemaster."

The Gamemaster

One player in the game acts as a referee, or Gamemaster. Everyone else takes on the role of a character (a hero) in the story the Gamemaster tells. The Gamemaster narrates the story, creates the challenges the other players must face, and plays the role of every other character or creature the player-controlled heroes interact with during the adventure.

It's a big job, but it's a lot of fun, and every roleplaying game needs a Gamemaster. If you think you'd like to be the Gamemaster, finish reading the fast-play rules for players—which includes everything up until the hero templates—and then read through the section titled "So You Want to Be the Gamemaster".

The Player's Role

As a player, your primary job in any ALTERNITY game is to portray one of the heroes in the story your group decides to play out. The heroes are the stars of the unfolding adventures that make up a Gamemaster's ongoing DARK•MATTER campaign.

To do this, you need a hero—an imaginary character who serves as your "connection" with the Gamemaster's setting and the other players' heroes.

Your hero starts out as a collection of numbers and descriptive terms; from then on it's up to you to make that hero come alive through roleplaying. By reacting as you think your hero would react and interacting with the other characters using your hero's voice and opinions, you're doing your job as a player. You need to be clever, resourceful, and more than a little bit paranoid if your hero is going to discover the truth about what's going on.

Key Concepts

Let's take a look at the key concepts behind the ALTERNITY game. These concepts include basic game mechanics, fundamental character information, and a few special terms that players need to become familiar with.

Hero: An imaginary character controlled by a player.

Gamemaster: The participant in the game who acts as the moderator, narrating adventures and representing other characters in the adventure who aren't controlled by the players.

Supporting Cast: These are the aforementioned "other characters," including the heroes' friends and enemies, as well as any other characters the heroes come into contact with. Although the heroes are the stars of the show, it's possible for members of the supporting cast to be just as powerful as the heroes—or sometimes even more powerful. Villains, supernatural monsters, and dangerous alien creatures are supporting characters who might defeat the heroes outright in a game confrontation.

Adventure: A scenario in which the heroes interact with the supporting cast to create a group story. Every adventure is built around a situation (typically a mystery the heroes need to solve), and it concludes when the heroes have either achieved their goal or failed to do so. When you sit down to play the scenario described in the Gamemaster section of these rules, you're playing an adventure. It might take an hour of the players' time, or it may take several play sessions.

Campaign: Just because the heroes solve one mystery or defeat one villain, their story isn't over. In a roleplaying game, the heroes may undertake a number of adventures. A campaign is a series of adventures in which the same group of heroes take on new challenges. As long as the Gamemaster keeps running new adventures for the same heroes in the same imaginary world, he or she is running a campaign.

Setting: The backdrop against which an adventure or campaign takes place. The fast-play adventure presented in the Gamemaster's fast-play rules section takes place in a rest stop in the mountains of Idaho during a winter storm.

Profession: Every hero in the ALTERNITY game is built around a profession. A profession is an overarching occupation that describes in general terms what the hero is good at. It's the first defining concept associated with a hero. The four basic professions—Combat Spec, Diplomat, Free Agent, and Tech Op—are introduced in these fast-play rules.

Abilities: All characters (heroes and members of the supporting cast) have six Abilities. These are Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Will, and Personality.

Ability Scores: Each Ability is expressed as a number, called the Ability Score. A high score (11 or better) means that a character excels in that area; a low score (6 or less) indicates that a character is definitely below par.

Skills: Ability Scores represent a hero's natural aptitudes, but skills tell you what your hero has been trained to do. Think of your hero's skill list as a summary of his or her education and professional training. Skills are based on your hero's Ability Scores, just as training adds to a person's natural talents. A hero's proficiency with a skill is expressed as a number, which is known as the skill score.

Actions: When a hero wants to use a skill or an Ability to accomplish something, he or she attempts an action. There are different types of actions, each involving the use of different skills and characteristics.

Dice: When the outcome of an action is in doubt, or when the Gamemaster needs to measure a character's degree of success, dice are rolled. The ALTERNITY game uses two kinds of dice: a single control die and situation dice of various sizes. The control die and a situation die are rolled together to determine the outcome of an action.

Note: The lower the roll, the better the chance that the hero succeeds in what he or she tries to do. The following section contains more information on how to use the dice.

Playing the Game

The basic rule at the foundation of the ALTERNITY game is a simple one. Your hero has some important game statistics, including Ability Scores, skill scores, and an action check score. In many cases, when your hero attempts to accomplish something, the Gamemaster asks you to roll dice. You then try to roll a number that's *equal to or less than* the appropriate score. If you roll higher than your hero's score, your hero fails. Whenever a hero tries to do something that might fail, this dice roll determines if he or she succeeds.

As you read through this section, refer to the hero templates in this chapter. You'll see how a hero's characteristics work in the context of the game system.

Rolling Dice

The ALTERNITY game system uses a set of polyhedral (many-sided) dice. The set includes four-sided, six-sided, eight-sided, twelve-sided, and twenty-sided dice. These are almost always abbreviated as d4, d6, d8, d12, and d20.

Sometimes, you may need to roll several dice and add the results together; in this case, you'll see an abbreviation such as 2d4 (roll the four-sided die twice, adding the results) or 2d6 (roll the six-sided die twice, adding the results). If you have enough dice, feel free to roll both six-siders or four-siders together.

Finally, you'll also run across die modifiers, such as d4+2 or d6–1. All you have to do here is roll the appropriate die and then modify the result by adding or subtracting the given number. For example, you're rolling d4+2 wound points because your hero shot a werewolf with a silver bullet. If you roll a 3 on the d4, the result is 5 wound points.

Skill Checks, Action Checks, and Feat Checks

In a roleplaying game, dice determine the outcome of a character action with uncertain results. In the ALTERNITY game, there are three types of common die rolls: skill checks, action checks, and ability feat checks.

Skill Checks: When your hero attempts to use a skill in play, you must roll a skill check. You'll roll a d20, and you may add or subtract a penalty or bonus die assigned by the Gamemaster. If the total on the dice is equal to or less than the appropriate skill score, your hero succeeds at the skill check.

Action Checks: During combat scenes or fast-paced challenges, it's important to know which character goes first. This is resolved by an action check. When the Gamemaster tells you to make an action check for your hero, you should roll a d20 and compare it to your hero's action check score. The lower you roll, the faster your hero acts.

Feat Checks: Sometimes you may want your hero to try something that doesn't have any real skill or training associated with it. For example, you might want your hero to pry open a crumpled car door to help an accident victim, or wriggle through a small space to escape from a pack of slavering ghouls. The Gamemaster may ask you to make a feat check using one of your hero's six Ability Scores to determine success or failure.

The Most Important Rule: Not every action requires a dice roll! Gamemasters call for rolls only in dramatic situations to determine the success of an action whose outcome is in doubt, or when they need to judge the degree of an action's success.

If your hero wants to cross a street or carry a small pack, no dice rolls are necessary. But if she wants to cross the street carrying a wounded companion, while being shot at by snipers, then the situation is dramatic, and dice should be rolled.

A pilot hero trained to fly a spacecraft and read star charts doesn't need to roll dice to perform the normal duties associated with his or her area of expertise. But when these actions go beyond the call of duty and lives hang in the balance, the Gamemaster may call for skill checks or feat checks.

The Control Die and Situation Dice

The ALTERNITY game uses two kinds of dice: a control die and a situation die. Whenever the Gamemaster calls for a roll, you roll one control die and one situation die. The sum of the die results indicates a success or a failure.

When you roll the dice, in game terms you're making a check for your hero—in effect, "checking" to see how the dice roll compares to one of your hero's scores. In any case, you're looking to get as low a result as possible—the lower the roll, the better the chance that your hero succeeds at what she is trying to do.

- The control die is always a 20-sided die (d20).
- The situation die for any particular check is one of the following: a four-sided die (d4), a six-sided die (d6), an eight-sided die (d8), a 12-sided die (d12), or a 20-sided die (d20). There is also a d0, a placeholder to represent the situation die in a case when success is determined only by the roll of the control die.

Further, the situation die on any check is either a plus die or a minus die. A plus die, such as +d4, is bad for the roller, because it tends to produce a higher result. A minus die, such as –d6, is good for the roller, because it helps to achieve a lower result.

Add or subtract the situation die from the control die as instructed by the Gamemaster. If the result is equal to or less than the score related to the hero's action, the action succeeds. If the result is greater than the score, the action fails. The degrees of success are explained on the next page.

Example: Your hero wants to make a quick repair to his motorcycle so he can stay on the trail of the fleeing criminals. Fortunately, he's carrying a small tool set in his backpack. This action is a skill check using your hero's Technical Science–*juryrig* skill score. The Gamemaster tells you to roll the control die and a –d4 (the hero has the right tools for the job, so the Gamemaster decides that the situation is moderately favorable). Your hero's *juryrig* skill score is 13.

You roll the dice, and these numbers come up: 14 on the control die, 3 on the situation die. The result is 11 (14 – 3), which is lower than your hero's *juryrig* score. The action succeeds!

Base Situation Die

Before you can slide up or down on the Situation Die Steps Scale, you need to know where to start. That starting point is called the base situation die.

- For an action check, the base situation die is +d0, or no modifier to the control die.
- For an ability check, the base situation die is +d4. Roll the d20 and add a d4, adding the results together.
- For a skill check against a specialty skill, the base situation die is +d0.
- For a skill check against a broad skill, the base situation die is +d4.

If the Gamemaster tells you to apply a bonus or a penalty to your hero's roll, start at the base situation die and move the proper number of steps in the appropriate direction to determine which situation die to roll.

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE

BONUS												PENALTY
–d20	–d12	–d8	–d6	–d4	+d0	+d4	+d6	+d8	+d12	+d20	+2d20	+3d20

Situation Die Steps

The Situation Die Steps Scale can help you quickly determine what situation die to roll with the control die. It's printed on the previous page and on the hero templates that appear later.

Your Gamemaster tells you what bonus or penalty applies when you roll to see whether your hero can perform a certain action.

A +1 step situation penalty means you start with your hero's base situation die (see the sidebar on the previous page) and move one step in the "Penalty" direction to find the die you'll be rolling. For instance, if your hero's base situation die for an action is +d4, then a +1 step situation penalty changes the die to +d6.

A –2 step situation bonus means you find your hero's base situation die on the scale and move two steps in the "Bonus" direction. For example, if your hero's base situation die for an action is +d4, then a –2 step situation bonus changes the die to –d4.

Degrees of Success

Every dice roll has one of five possible results: Critical Failure, Failure, Ordinary success, Good success, or Amazing success. The lower your dice roll, the greater the degree of success your hero achieves. The three numbers associated with every skill score and action check score (the base score and two smaller numbers) represent the dividing points between the degrees of success.

Regardless of what number comes up on the situation die, a roll of 20 on the control die always produces a Critical Failure. Generally, this means that bad luck has befallen the hero, and no matter how high his or her skill score or Ability Score is, this action doesn't succeed.

A result greater than the score is a Failure; equal to or less than the score is an Ordinary success; equal to or less than the second number is a Good success; and equal to or less than the smallest number is an Amazing success. For example, if your hero has a skill score of 12/6/3, a roll of 1 to 3 is an Amazing success; a roll of 4 to 6 is a Good success; a roll of 7 to 12 is an Ordinary success; and a roll of 13 or higher is a Failure.

On the hero templates, the "Action Check Score" line begins with a number that represents a Marginal result. A hero can't get a Failure or a Critical Failure outcome when making an action check; if the dice roll yields a number greater than the action check score, the "Failure" is a Marginal result instead.

Scenes

Every adventure your Gamemaster sets up is built out of scenes. A scene is a distinct episode that has a beginning and ending. The three types of scenes are combat, encounter, and challenge. A combat scene lasts from the start of a battle to its conclusion. An encounter scene lasts from the moment characters meet to when they part company. A challenge scene lasts as long as it takes the heroes to identify the challenge, then overcome it or be defeated by it.

Action Rounds

For the purpose of determining who acts when in a scene, every scene is divided into action rounds. During an action round, every hero performs one action.

A round is divided into four phases. Each phase relates to one of the degrees of success that are achievable on an action check: Amazing, Good, Ordinary, and Marginal, in order from the first phase to the last. Heroes can attempt only one action in a round.

To determine who acts first in a round, every participant makes an action check by rolling a d20 and comparing the result to the hero's action check score. The result determines the earliest phase in which a hero can act. So, if a hero rolls a Good action check, the earliest phase he or she can act in is the second, or Good, phase.

All actions in a phase occur simultaneously, with the results of those actions being applied at the end of the phase.

Example: Your hero has an action check score of 11. At the beginning of a round, the Gamemaster calls for action checks. If you roll a 5 (a Good success for a score of 11), the earliest phase in which your hero can act is the Good phase. He can't do anything in the Amazing phase since his action check wasn't low enough, but he can take one action in the Good phase. If you roll a 13 (a Marginal result), your hero can't act until the Marginal phase (the last phase of the round).

Damage

Heroes lead dangerous lives. Eventually, your hero will suffer damage. As indicated on the hero templates, damage comes in three forms: stun, wound, and mortal.

Stun Damage

Stun damage is the lightest type of damage your hero can sustain. It represents shocks and bruises that rattle a hero but don't result in lasting injuries. When your hero suffers stun damage, mark off one stun box for each point of stun damage she sustains.

Knockout: When all of her stun boxes are marked, your hero is knocked out and can perform no actions until she recovers.

Wound Damage

Wound damage is more serious than stun damage. It represents injuries that cause lasting harm to the body. When your hero receives wound damage, mark off one wound box for each point of wound damage he sustains.

Secondary Damage: Wound damage causes secondary stun damage. For every 2 points of wound damage inflicted on your hero, he also receives 1 point of stun damage.

Knockout: When all of his wound boxes are marked, your hero is knocked out and can perform no actions until he recovers.

Mortal Damage

Mortal damage is the most severe form of damage. It represents massive injuries to vital body parts. When your hero receives mortal damage, mark off one mortal box for each point of mortal damage she sustains.

Secondary Damage: Mortal damage causes secondary stun damage and wound damage. For every 2 points of mortal damage inflicted on your hero, she also receives 1 point of wound and 1 point of stun damage.

Dazed: Mortal damage takes a toll on a hero immediately. For every mortal box marked, your hero receives a +1 step situation penalty to any actions she attempts.

Death: When all of your hero's mortal boxes are marked off, she dies. Don't worry; you can always make up another hero and rejoin the adventure when the Gamemaster deems it appropriate.

Recovery

How heroes recover from damage depends on their condition (conscious or not) and the type of damage they have suffered.

Stun Damage: Stun damage is fleeting and disappears at the end of a scene. It can be repaired during a scene by the use of Knowledge–*first aid*, Medical Science, or some other form of medical treatment.

Wound Damage: Wound damage remains until it is healed by rest and/or medical attention.

Mortal Damage: Mortal damage requires the use of the Medical Science–*surgery* skill and medical attention to repair.

Knockout: Assume that if a hero is knocked out from stun damage, she remains unconscious for the rest of the round in which she was knocked out and all of the following round. At the start of the round after that, she recovers 1 stun point and awakens. If a hero is knocked out from wound damage, she can't awaken until at least 1 point of her wound damage is healed through medical attention.

The Hero Templates

Take a look at the hero templates. The compilation of numbers and game terms on these one-page descriptions makes up a hero template. All the information that you need to know about the hero to play the ALTERNITY game is listed here.

The ALTERNITY *Player's Handbook* contains extensive rules for creating your own hero from scratch. We've taken the liberty of creating six characters for you. All you have to do is pick one that you'd like to play in the game.

Flip back and forth between the hero templates and this section as we explain what these terms and numbers mean.

1 Name and Gender

We've come up with names, genders, and personality notes for each hero in the template section. You don't have to use any of this material if you don't want to. Feel free to think up a new name for the hero you want to play, change the gender indicated on the sheet, or play the hero with a different personality than the one suggested on the template.

2 Profession

Four distinct hero professions are available in these fast-play rules.

- **Combat Specs** (short for specialists) are gunmen, brawlers, martial artists, and soldiers who rely on physical power and endurance to supplement their training in the tactics and techniques of battle.
- **Diplomats** are negotiators, managers, deal-makers, merchants, clergy, and any others who use interaction skills and personal resolve to accomplish their jobs.
- **Free Agents** are troubleshooters and field operatives who rely on agility, interaction skills, and natural independence to get a job done. They're agents who might be for hire, or they might have ties to a specific government or organization.
- **Tech Ops** (technical operatives) are skilled in the use of particular equipment or have been specially trained to create or maintain high-tech equipment. They rely on natural genius, agility, and expert training to accomplish their goals.

Pick a profession that fits the kind of hero you want to play, then select one of the corresponding fast-play hero templates.

3 Career

The career entry on the hero template is a description of what kind of professional the hero is. During hero creation, the career guides your selection of skills appropriate to your hero. In these fast-play rules, the entry is nothing more than a tagline to identify what your hero does for a living.

4 Abilities

The six Ability Scores rate your hero's natural aptitude or capability for meeting physical and mental challenges. These scores range from 4 to 14; 10 represents the average for a hero.

- **Strength** (STR) defines a hero's physical power and prowess. Donna Truitt, one of the hero templates, has a Strength score of 9, which is slightly below average for a hero.
- **Dexterity** (DEX) measures the quality of a hero's agility, coordination, and reflexes. Donna's Dexterity is 12, so she's significantly more agile than the average hero.
- **Constitution** (CON) describes a hero's overall physical fitness and toughness. Donna's Constitution is only 8, which is lower than that of an average hero, so she's not very tough.
- **Intelligence** (INT) indicates a hero's mental quickness and learning ability. Donna's Intelligence of 12 means that she's pretty sharp.
- **Will** (WIL) gauges a hero's mental fortitude and intuitive capacity. With a Will of 9, Donna's slightly less strong-willed than an average hero.
- **Personality** (PER) indicates a hero's social abilities and charisma. Donna's average here, with a Personality of 10.

Untrained: The "Untrained" score is equal to one-half of the full Ability Score, rounded down. This is your hero's skill score when she attempts an action that requires a skill she doesn't possess. For example, Dr. Akens doesn't have the Unarmed Attack skill, which is based on Strength. If Dr. Akens tries to throw a punch, his skill score is half his Strength score—4, in this case.

Resistance Modifiers: Resistance modifiers affect the type of dice your hero's opponents roll when confronting your hero. Positive modifiers (such as a +1 step penalty) are good for your hero, because they provide a penalty to the opponent; a negative modifier (such as a –1 step bonus) is bad, because it makes

it easier for your hero's opponent to succeed. These modifiers apply when the opponent is using a skill that your hero could resist because of her natural aptitude in one particular ability score. Refer back to "Situation Die Steps" in the previous section.

Example: A hero with a Dexterity score of 11 has a +1 step resistance modifier for that Ability. If an opponent fires a pistol at her, that +1 step is applied as a penalty to the opponent's chance of successfully hitting his target.

5 Action Check

The *action check* is a game tool for determining when your hero gets to go in the course of an action round. See the section called "Skill Checks, Action Checks, and Feat Checks," above.

6 Durability

The "Durability" section of each hero template provides a means for keeping track of any damage your hero might sustain over the course of an adventure. Your hero's stun and wound ratings equal his Constitution score. Your hero's mortal rating equals one-half this score, rounded up.

As your hero suffers damage during an adventure, mark off open boxes to keep track of how much damage he has sustained and how much more he can afford to take.

7 Skills

Each hero template has a selection of skills printed on it. There are two kinds of skills: broad skills and specialty skills. Specialty skills are printed in *italic* type to differentiate them from broad skills. Think of a broad skill as general training in a particular field (medical school). A specialty skill, on the other hand, represents a particular task or focus (surgery or internal medicine).

A character must possess a broad skill to learn a specialty skill associated with it.

Rank: Rank is the amount of advanced training the hero has in a particular specialty skill. If a hero possesses a specialty skill, she automatically has a rank of at least 1 in that skill, but some heroes might have 2 or even 3 ranks in skills they're very good at. Broad skills don't have ranks, since they represent more general education and training.

Skill Descriptions

This fast-play chapter doesn't have enough space to contain details of what a particular skill enables a hero to do. Those details are provided in the ALTERNITY *Player's Handbook*. However, for the purpose of learning how the game system works (and for putting heroes through the fast-play adventure), complete skill descriptions aren't necessary. You and your Gamemaster should have little trouble determining when a certain skill comes into play.

In most cases, the name of a skill is a pretty strong clue to how the skill can be used. For example, a hero with the Manipulation broad skill is talented at performing actions that require a high degree of eye-hand coordination, such as picking a lock.

Skill Score: The skill score is the total of a character's natural aptitude—her Ability score—and any special training she possesses in a particular skill—her skill rank. Broad skills have scores equal to their associated Abilities, since they don't add ranks. The higher the skill score, the more likely it is the hero will succeed when she attempts to use that skill.

All skill scores are presented with the full score, half that score, and one-quarter that score. This represents the numbers needed to achieve an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success when the Gamemaster asks you to make a skill check for your hero.

If a hero wants to try something but doesn't have the proper skill, she must use her untrained score for the associated Ability.

8 Combat Information and Equipment

Each hero template includes a selection of equipment the hero has access to—weapons, tools, body armor, and other gear.

The numbers identifying a weapon indicate how much damage the weapon inflicts on an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success. This damage is either stun (s), wound (w), or mortal (m) damage.

On the next line, "Range" gives the distance at which a weapon can strike a target, either "Personal" if physical contact is necessary, or a series of numbers representing short/medium/long range (in meters) for a gun.

"Type" refers to the kind of damage a weapon inflicts, either low impact (LI), high impact (HI), or energy (En). Fists, knives, clubs, and other muscle-powered weapons are low impact; firearms are high impact; and energy weapons discharge electricity or some other form of energy.

For armor, the die ranges preceding "LI," "HI," and "En" indicate the amount of damage the armor stops when the wearer is hit by a weapon that does this type of damage. If a subtraction from a die roll produces a result less than 1, the armor failed to block any damage on that attack.

Ready to Go?

Now that you understand the basic structure of the ALTERNITY game, you're ready to send your hero into action.

You'll probably play through the adventure presented in the Gamemaster's section of these fast-play rules, but if your Gamemaster has experience in designing original adventures, she may have something else planned for you and your companions.

What Do I Do First?

If you're new to roleplaying games, you might be wondering how things get started. Basically, it's pretty simple: After you've created a hero and gotten together with the rest of your group for your first adventure, your Gamemaster presents a situation—maybe something like this:

You're viewing an exhibit in a museum when a man you've never seen before staggers through the entryway. He stumbles around the room until he reaches you. "Help me, please. You can't let them get this," he whispers, pressing some kind of amulet or pendant into your hand—then he collapses to the floor, a knife sticking out of his back.

In the hallway outside, you can hear running footsteps, and the click of someone pulling back the action of a gun . . .

After the Gamemaster sets the scene, she asks, "What do you want to do?" In game terms, doing something is known as taking an action. You might know right away what your hero's action will be, but don't just call out an answer. Wait for the Gamemaster to say it's your turn.

What can heroes do? Almost anything! A hero can say something, move, use a skill, use a piece of equipment, look for clues, duck beneath a table, or anything else you can think of.

After all the heroes have performed their actions and the Gamemaster has had the members of the supporting cast take their actions, the process starts again. Now the situation is different from what it was when the scene opened, and the next actions the heroes attempt might also be different.

So You Want to Be the Gamemaster?

This section of the fast-play rules provides an overview of the Gamemaster's role in an ALTERNITY game. It contains a short DARK•MATTER adventure that you can use to introduce your players to the game and familiarize yourself with the art of presenting and moderating a roleplaying game.

The Role of the Gamemaster

As the Gamemaster, you have a number of jobs to handle during and between game sessions. Unlike other types of games that have strict rules and deal with limited situations, a roleplaying game such as the DARK•MATTER setting is as wide open as the players' imaginations. For this reason, the presence of a game moderator to act as referee, story designer, and narrator is essential.

The players interact with each other and the game environment through the actions of their characters, the heroes. The Gamemaster describes each scene, directs the action, and plays the roles of the supporting cast members—villains, allies, and extras who inhabit the campaign world.

However, the Gamemaster isn't competing against the players. When the Gamemaster and the players get together to tell a fun and exciting group story, everybody wins. That's the power and appeal of a roleplaying game.

Key Concepts

Let's take a look at some of the key concepts behind moderating the ALTERNITY game. Some of these terms have also been defined earlier, but they're repeated here for the sake of completeness within the Gamemaster section.

Gamemaster: The participant in the game who acts as the moderator, narrating adventures and controlling characters who are involved in the story but aren't directly controlled by players.

Hero: An imaginary character controlled by a player.

Supporting Cast: The other characters who appear in every story: friends, enemies, and incidental characters with whom the heroes interact. The Gamemaster controls members of the supporting cast.

Setting: The imaginary context and environment within which the heroes operate. The DARK•MATTER game is set in a world very much like our own, except that the broad spectrum of paranormal and occult phenomena is frighteningly real—to those who know what to look for.

Adventure: A scenario in which the heroes interact to create a group story. As Gamemaster, you present an opening situation or scene (called the "trigger"). The rest of the adventure unfolds through the actions of the heroes (as dictated by their players) and the moderation of the Gamemaster (through story events and the supporting cast).

Campaign: A continuing series of adventures that takes place in a single setting and focuses on the same group of heroes. A campaign can be finite, ending after as many adventures as necessary to tell the complete story; or it can be an ongoing tale, progressing like a television or comic book series.

Group Story: While a regular story, such as found in a movie or a book, features a set beginning, middle, and ending, a group story is more dynamic. The Gamemaster has an outline that provides a series of encounters and events, and a few possible ways the adventure could end. The dynamic comes from the group—the players and Gamemaster—who determine the course of the story and its outcome through the interaction of their imaginary characters. In a group story, no one—not even the Gamemaster—knows exactly how how it all will end.

Game Session: One distinct period of game play; a time when you gather your friends to play the ALTERNITY game. Some adventures can be completed in a single session; others might require several sessions to reach a conclusion.

Using the Game Mechanic

The ALTERNITY game is built around a core mechanic that has nearly universal application. All heroic actions in the game are resolved by rolling just two dice: a control die and a situation die. A control die is always a d20; a situation die can be a d4, d6, d8, d12, or d20. Depending on how hard or easy a particular task is, the result of the situation die is added to or subtracted from the result of the control die, as detailed in the player's fast-play rules.

You can use the dice in varying ways, though the mechanic is always the same: Roll two dice, trying to achieve a number that's equal to or less than a character's appropriate score. If the task is associated with a skill, then the skill score is used. If it's a feat check, then the associated Ability Score is used. In all uses of dice during a game session—except when rolling for damage—low results are better than high ones.

Use the mechanic to determine the success of an attack, using an appropriate combat skill; to overcome a challenge, using a physical or mental skill; or to determine the outcome of an encounter, using a Personality skill in conjunction with good roleplaying.

The Most Important Rule

Not every action requires a dice roll. When the heroes attempt normal, everyday tasks, they should accomplish them without consulting the dice. In heroic situations, when the outcome is in doubt and the result could mean life or death, then have the players roll dice.

Name: Jane McDermott

Profession: Combat Specialist
Career: Law Enforcer (state trooper)

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	11	5	+1 step
Dexterity	10	5	
Constitution	9	4	
Intelligence	9	4	
Will	12	6	+1 step
Personality	9	4	

Action Check Score: 13+/12/6/3

1–3	Amazing	7–12	Ordinary
4–6	Good	13+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 9	○○○○○○○○○
Wound 9	○○○○○○○○○
Mortal 5	○○○○○

Skills

Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A Skill Score
Athletics*	—	STR	11/5/2
Climb	1	STR	12/6/3
Unarmed Attack*	—	STR	11/5/2
Power martial arts	1	STR	12/6/3
Ranged Weapons*	—	DEX	10/5/2
Pistol	2	DEX	12/6/3
Rifle	1	DEX	11/5/2
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	10/5/2
Land (car)	1	DEX	11/5/2
Stamina*	—	CON	9/4/2
Endurance	1	CON	10/5/2
Knowledge*	—	INT	9/4/2
First aid	1	INT	10/5/2
Law*	—	INT	9/4/2
Enforcement	1	INT	10/5/2
Awareness*	—	WIL	12/6/3
Perception	1	WIL	13/6/3
Interaction*	—	PER	9/4/2
Intimidate	1	PER	10/5/2

*Broad skill checks carry a +1 step penalty.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)*	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Martial arts	12/6/3	Personal	d6+1s/d6+3s/d4+1w	LI
9mm pistol	12/6/3	6/12/50 m	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4m	HI
Shotgun**	11/5/2	6/12/30 m	d4w/d6w/d4m	HI

*Attacks at medium range suffer a +1 step penalty; attacks at long range suffer a +2 step penalty.
**The shotgun inflicts double damage at short range and half damage at long range.

Armor

Kevlar vest	d6–3 (LI)	d6–2 (HI)	d4–2 (En)

Equipment

Kevlar vest*, 9mm pistol with 15 rounds, flashlight, handcuffs (two sets), personal radio, police cruiser with 12 gauge shotgun* and 20 shells*, police radio, toolkit.

*The vest is stored in the trunk of her car and can be worn under her uniform. The shotgun and ammunition are also in the trunk.

Background and Personality

Jane McDermott grew up in Boise, Idaho. After attending a local community college for two years, she took the Idaho State Trooper exam and passed with flying colors. She's been out of the academy for about a year and a half now, which is long enough that her peers don't call her "rookie" anymore unless they're trying to get under her skin. In fact, her fellow officers made a point of giving her a necklace with a silver bullet on it to commemorate the time she saved a man from a rabid coyote that attacked him while he was changing his tire on the roadside.

Officer McDermott is tall and athletic. She has always enjoyed physical challenges, and she spends a lot of her off-duty time rock climbing and working on her tae kwon do. She's very stubborn and self-reliant, and strongly inclined to handle situations by herself instead of calling in help if it's at all possible. That might get her into trouble someday. . . .

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE

BONUS												PENALTY
–d20	–d12	–d8	–d6	–d4	+d0	+d4	+d6	+d8	+d12	+d20	+2d20	+3d20

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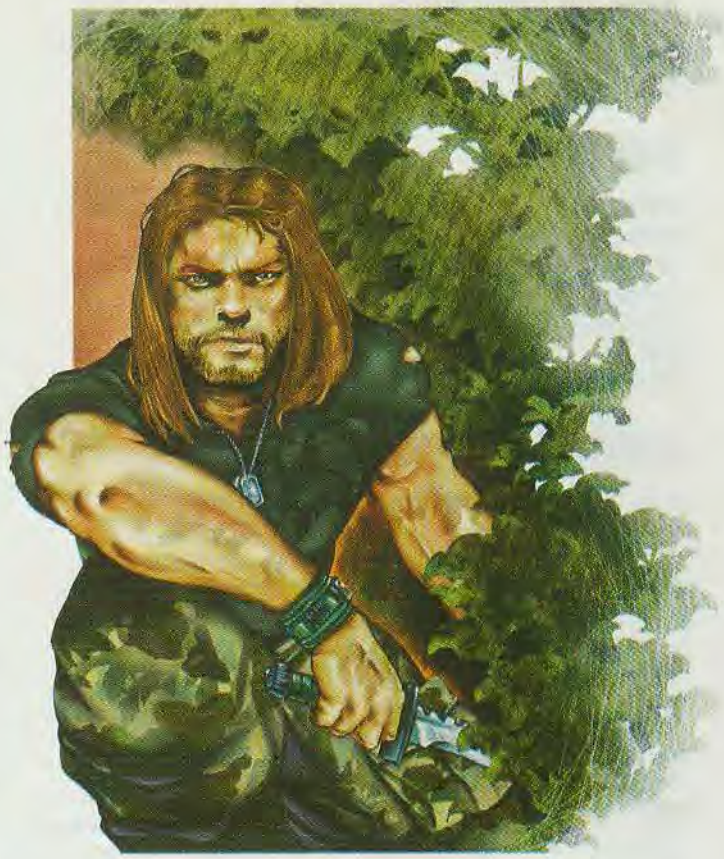
Name: Will Wheeler

Profession: Combat Specialist
Career: Militiaman



Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	12	6	+1 step
Dexterity	11	5	+1 step
Constitution	12	6	
Intelligence	10	5	
Will	8	4	
Personality	7	3	

Action Check Score: 14+/13/6/3

1–3	Amazing	7–13	Ordinary
4–6	Good	14+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 12 ○○○○○○○○○○○○
Wound 12 ○○○○○○○○○○○○
Mortal 6 ○○○○○○

Skills

Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A Skill Score
Athletics*	—	STR	12/6/3
Climb	1	STR	13/6/3
Jump	1	STR	13/6/3
Throw	1	STR	13/6/3
Unarmed Attack*	—	STR	12/6/3
Ranged Weapons*	—	DEX	11/5/2
Pistol	1	DEX	12/6/3
Rifle	2	DEX	13/6/3
Stealth*	—	DEX	11/5/2
Sneak	1	DEX	12/6/3
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	11/5/2
Stamina*	—	CON	12/6/3
Endurance	1	CON	13/6/3
Survival*	—	CON	12/6/3
Mountain	1	CON	13/6/3
Winter	1	CON	13/6/3
Knowledge*	—	INT	10/5/2
First aid	1	INT	11/5/2
Animal Handling*	—	WIL	8/4/2
Horse riding	1	WIL	9/4/2
Awareness*	—	WIL	8/4/2
Interaction*	—	PER	7/3/1

*Broad skill checks carry a +1 step penalty.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)*	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Unarmed	12/6/3	Personal	d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s	LI
.38 pistol	12/6/3	6/12/40	d4w/d4+1w/d4m	HI
Assault rifle**	13/6/3	60/120/300	d4+2w/d6+3w/d4+1m	HI

*Attacks at medium range suffer a +1 step penalty; attacks at long range suffer a +2 step penalty.
**The assault rifle can be fired in full automatic mode. This lets you roll three attacks instead of one, at a +1, +2, and +3 step penalty.

Equipment

Lighter and pack of cigarettes; .38 caliber pistol with 6 rounds, carried in an ankle holster; assault rifle with 30 rounds, in lockbox in the truck; beat-up 4WD Suburban with police band radio and CB radio; 500 antigovernment pamphlets, in truck.

Background and Personality

Will Wheeler is a native of Moscow, Idaho. He joined the Army right out of high school and served for a four-year enlistment before coming back home to work on his father's ranch. When the ranch failed and tax collectors confiscated his family's land, Will decided that he didn't need to support the government with his tax dollars anymore. He's drifted through a couple of militia groups and is currently living in an isolated "free haven" run by a group calling itself the Liberty Church. Will's also a little bit wanted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, but they haven't posted an APB on him yet.

Will is a short, broad-shouldered man built like a baby bull. He dresses in camo pants, Army boots, and T-shirts, and he wears his hair shoulder-length. He's paranoid and angry, and he's got a lot of guns. But he honestly believes that America could be a better place, and he's willing to do anything to make it all happen.

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE

BONUS												PENALTY
-d20	-d12	-d8	-d6	-d4	+d0	+d4	+d6	+d8	+d12	+d20	+2d20	+3d20

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Name: Dr. Nadine Neary

Profession: Tech Op
Career: Doctor

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	7	3	
Dexterity	11	5	+1 step
Constitution	8	4	
Intelligence	13	6	+2 steps
Will	10	5	
Personality	11	5	

Action Check Score: 14+/13/6/3

1–3	Amazing	7–13	Ordinary
4–6	Good	14+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 8 ○○○○○○○○
Wound 8 ○○○○○○○○
Mortal 4 ○○○○

Skills

Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A Skill Score
Athletics*	—	STR	7/3/1
Acrobatics*	—	DEX	11/5/2
Defensive martial arts	1	DEX	12/6/3
Tumbling	1	DEX	12/6/3
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	11/5/2
Knowledge*	—	INT	13/6/3
Computer operation	2	INT	15/7/3
Deduce	1	INT	14/7/3
Life Science	—	INT	13/6/3
Biology	2	INT	15/7/3
Medical Science*	—	INT	13/6/3
Forensics	2	INT	15/7/3
Medical Knowledge	3	INT	16/8/4
Surgery	1	INT	14/7/3
Treatment	3	INT	16/8/4
Awareness*	—	WIL	10/5/2
Interaction*	—	PER	11/5/2
Charm	1	PER	12/6/3

*Broad skill checks carry a +1 step penalty.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Martial arts	12/6/3	Personal	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI
Gun*	5/2/1	by weapon	by weapon	HI

*Dr. Neary does not have any skill with firearms and doesn't carry a gun. If she picks up a gun and tries to use it, she must make an untrained Ranged Weapons skill check to attack with the weapon.

Equipment

Doctor's bag, personal alarm in purse, beeper, late-model Volvo with cell phone, luggage, road survival kit including 6 road flares, 4 hazard markers, a space blanket, and a gallon of antifreeze.

Doctor's Bag

Dr. Neary can use her training and the supplies in her doctor's bag to help injured characters. She can make Medical Science–*treatment* skill checks to do the following (with a –1 step bonus because of her *medical knowledge* skill):

- Revive a knocked-out character.
- Heal 2, 3, or 4 wound points with an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success on her skill check.
- Stabilize a character with mortal damage.

Background and Personality

Dr. Neary lives in Rochester, Minnesota, where she works at the Mayo Clinic. Her specialty is infectious diseases, and she often consults with the CDC—the Centers for Disease Control. She grew up in Iowa and attended Iowa State on a gymnastics scholarship before she went to medical school; she's still in good shape, and she likes to exercise to get her mind off her work. She is currently headed for Seattle, where she is scheduled to speak at a microbiology conference.

Nadine Neary is a small, slender woman with short-cropped hair and a friendly, open manner. She has a knack for putting people at ease.

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE

BONUS											PENALTY
–d20	–d12	–d8	–d6	–d4	+d0	+d4	+d6	+d8	+d12	+d20	+2d20	+3d20

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Name: Donna Truitt

Profession: Free Agent
Career: Thief

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	9	4	
Dexterity	12	6	+1 step
Constitution	8	4	
Intelligence	12	6	+1 step
Will	9	3	
Personality	10	5	

Action Check Score: 15+/14/7/3

1–3	Amazing	8–14	Ordinary
4–7	Good	15+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 8 ○○○○○○○○
Wound 8 ○○○○○○○○
Mortal 4 ○○○○

Skills

Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A Skill Score
Athletics*	—	STR	9/4/2
Climb	1	STR	10/5/2
Jump	2	STR	11/5/2
Acrobatics*	—	DEX	12/6/3
Defensive martial arts	1	DEX	13/6/3
Dodge	2	DEX	14/7/3
Manipulation*	—	DEX	12/6/3
Lockpick	1	DEX	13/6/3
Ranged Weapons*	—	DEX	12/6/3
Stealth*	—	DEX	12/6/3
Sneak	1	DEX	13/6/3
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	12/6/3
Stamina*	—	CON	8/4/2
Knowledge*	—	INT	12/6/3
Security*	—	INT	12/6/3
Devices	1	INT	13/6/3
Awareness*	—	WIL	9/4/2
Deception*	—	PER	10/5/2
Bluff	1	PER	11/5/2
Bribe	1	PER	11/5/2
Interaction*	—	PER	10/5/2

*Broad skill checks carry a +1 step penalty.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)*	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Martial arts	13/6/3	Personal	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI
.32 revolver	12/6/3	4/8/30	d4w/d6w/d4m	HI

*Attacks at medium range suffer a +1 step penalty; attacks at long range suffer a +2 step penalty.

Equipment

Break-in bag with lockpicks, grapnel pistol (30 meters of nylon rope), night-vision goggles, magnetic card for door locks, black jumpsuit, .32 caliber revolver with 5 rounds in purse, cell phone, 2001 Chevrolet Corvette (fire engine red).

Background and Personality

Donna Truitt is a professional burglar. She specializes in corporate espionage and similar high-security break-ins, stealing research data, account information, and similar materials on a contract basis. She was recruited and trained by the CIA out of college, but she left the Agency several years ago to pursue a freelance career. While she's capable of defending herself if discovered, Donna is very careful to avoid hurting people; she even refuses to work for people who might use the material she recovers to harm innocent people. Donna currently resides in Seattle, since many of her jobs take her to various high-tech corridors around the Pacific Rim.

Donna is a physically fit woman with long, dark hair and a disarming smile. She's very cynical and suspicious of people representing business or government interests. She usually tells people that she works as a security consultant.

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE

BONUS												PENALTY
–d20	–d12	–d8	–d6	–d4	+d0	+d4	+d6	+d8	+d12	+d20	+2d20	+3d20

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Name: Dr. Phillip Akens

Profession: Diplomat
Career: Parapsychologist

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	9	4	
Dexterity	6	3	–1 step
Constitution	8	4	
Intelligence	14	7	+2 steps
Will	12	6	+1 step
Personality	11	5	

Action Check Score: 12+/11/5/2

1–2	Amazing	6–11	Ordinary
4–5	Good	12+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 8 ○○○○○○○○
Wound 8 ○○○○○○○○
Mortal 4 ○○○○

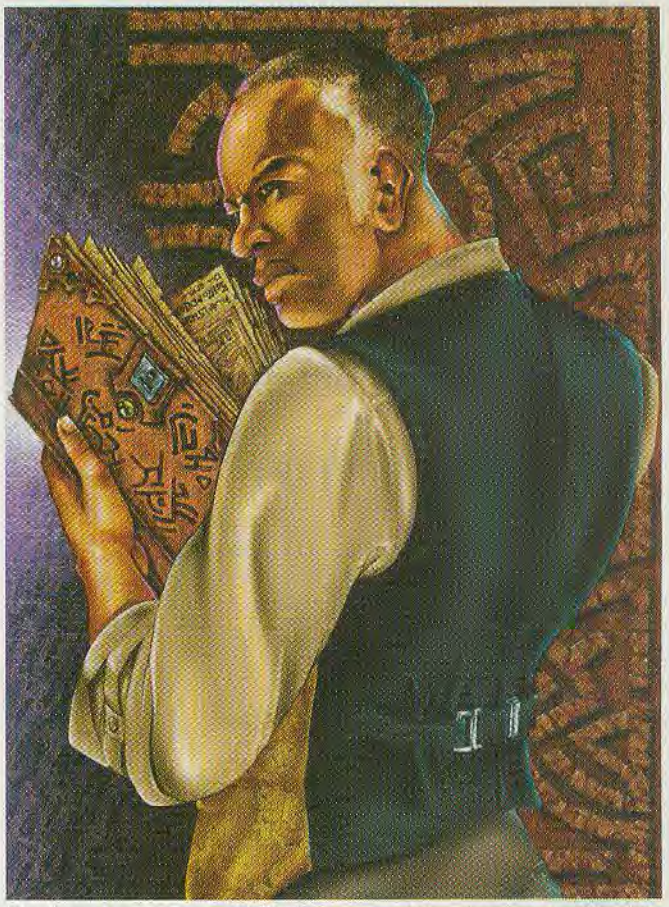
Skills

Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A Skill Score
Athletics*	—	STR	9/4/2
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	6/3/1
Stamina*	—	CON	8/4/2
Knowledge*	—	INT	14/7/3
Computer operation	1	INT	15/7/3
First aid	1	INT	15/7/3
Language (Greek)	2	INT	16/8/4
Language (Latin)	2	INT	16/8/4
Parapsychology	3	INT	17/8/4
Social Science*	—	INT	14/7/3
Anthropology	2	INT	16/8/4
History	2	INT	16/8/4
Linguistics	2	INT	16/8/4
Awareness*	—	WIL	12/6/3
Perception	1	WIL	13/6/3
Investigate*	—	WIL	12/6/3
Research	2	WIL	14/7/3
Search	2	WIL	14/7/3
Lore*	—	WIL	12/6/3
Occult lore	1	WIL	13/6/3
Psychic lore	1	WIL	13/6/3
Interaction*	—	PER	11/5/2
Interview	1	PER	12/6/3

*Broad skill checks carry a +1 step penalty.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Unarmed	4/2/1	Personal	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI
Gun*	3/1/–	by weapon	by weapon	HI



*Dr. Akens does not have any skill with firearms and doesn't carry a gun. If he picks up a gun and tries to use it, he must make an untrained Ranged Weapons skill check to attack with the weapon.

Equipment

Tape recorder; camera; specimen collection kit; laptop computer with cellular modem, database of paranormal activity patterns; blessed silver crucifix; luggage; VW Microbus with 150,000 miles on it.

Background and Personality

Dr. Akens has been studying paranormal activity for more than twenty years. He started out by investigating alleged haunted houses and psychic phenomena as a graduate student, and he's become one of the foremost experts on ghosts, hauntings, and occult traditions in the Midwest. Most academics don't take him seriously, of course, but Dr. Akens is one of the more reputable specialists in his field. He teaches anthropology and linguistics at Marquette University in Milwaukee to maintain some credibility with the college administration and to fund his occult investigations.

Dr. Akens is a tall, dignified man forty years of age, with a thoughtful manner and a deep, pleasant voice. He always takes people at their word and assumes that they're telling the truth about their experiences until hard evidence proves otherwise.

Dr. Akens is currently traveling to Portland to investigate a reported haunting. He's accompanied by Doug Nichols, a photojournalist.

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE

BONUS												PENALTY
–d20	–d12	–d8	–d6	–d4	+d0	+d4	+d6	+d8	+d12	+d20	+2d20	+3d20

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Name: Doug Nichols

Profession: Free Agent
Career: Photojournalist

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	10	5	
Dexterity	11	5	+1 step
Constitution	10	5	
Intelligence	9	4	
Will	11	5	+1 step
Personality	9	4	

Action Check Score: 13+/12/6/3

1–3	Amazing	7–12	Ordinary
4–6	Good	13+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 10 ○○○○○○○○○○
Wound 10 ○○○○○○○○○○
Mortal 5 ○○○○○

Skills

Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A Skill Score
Athletics*	—	STR	10/5/2
Climb	1	STR	11/5/2
Ski	1	STR	11/5/2
Unarmed Attack*	—	STR	10/5/2
Brawl	1	STR	11/5/2
Stealth*	—	DEX	11/5/2
Shadow	1	DEX	12/6/3
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	11/5/2
Movement*	—	CON	10/5/2
Trailblazing	1	CON	11/5/2
Stamina*	—	CON	10/5/2
Endurance	1	CON	11/5/2
Knowledge*	—	INT	9/4/2
Awareness*	—	WIL	11/5/2
Intuition	1	WIL	12/6/3
Creativity*	—	WIL	11/5/2
Photography	2	WIL	13/6/3
Investigate	—	WIL	11/5/2
Search	1	WIL	12/6/3
Interaction*	—	PER	9/4/2

* Broad skills have a base situation die of +d4.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Unarmed	11/5/2	Personal	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI
Gun*	5/2/1	by weapon	by weapon	HI

*Nichols does not have any skill with firearms and doesn't carry a gun. If he picks up a gun and tries to use it, he must make an untrained Ranged Weapons skill check to attack with the weapon.

Equipment

Professional-grade camcorder; tripod; still camera; tape recorder; laptop computer with video editing software; cellular phone; luggage.

Background and Personality

Ever since he was a kid, Doug Nichols has loved cameras and journalism. He worked on his school paper, served a tour in the Navy as a journalism specialist, and started freelancing as a photographer as soon as he got out of the service. He's been all over the world, specializing in archaeology shoots and nature documentaries. Documentary work pays the bills, but Nichols has another hobby—ghost-hunting. When he can find the time, he tries his hand at paranormal investigation, hoping to catch an image of something that's never been photographed before.

Nichols is a rangy, big-boned man in his late twenties. He has a laid-back manner, and he enjoys outdoor sports of all kinds. He's currently traveling with Dr. Phillip Akens, a paranormal investigator who intends to check out a reported haunting in Portland. But after that, Nichols hopes to get in some mountaineering, extreme skiing, and hiking around the southern Cascades before heading home.

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE

BONUS												PENALTY
–d20	–d12	–d8	–d6	–d4	+d0	+d4	+d6	+d8	+d12	+d20	+2d20	+3d20

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Situation Die Steps

The best tool you have as the Gamemaster is your ability to set the odds of any given task. You can do this by adding bonuses or penalties for given situations and counting in the appropriate direction on the Situation Die Steps Scale (presented in the player's section of the fast-play rules). Or, if you're more inclined toward quick resolutions, simply eyeball it by selecting the modifier that matches how difficult or easy you want the task to be.

Examples of Situation Modifiers

Weapon Range	**Short**	**Medium**	**Long**
Pistol	None	+1 step	+2 steps
Rifle	None	None	+1 step

Target has Cover		
Light Cover	Medium Cover	Heavy Cover
+1 step penalty	+2 step penalty	+3 step penalty

Situation			
Amazing difficulty	+3 steps	Amazing ease	–3 steps
Good difficulty	+2 steps	Good ease	–2 steps
Ordinary difficulty	+1 steps	Ordinary ease	–1 steps
Marginal difficulty	None	Marginal ease	None

Putting it Into Practice

What do you actually do with this information? That depends. Here are examples of both methods in action. Use either method or a combination of the two, as you see fit.

The Step-By-Step Method: Michele's hero, Detective Jones, wants to take a shot at the villainous cult leader. Jones has the pistol skill, so he has a base situation die of +d0. The cult leader is 10 meters away from Jones, which is medium range (+1 step penalty) for his weapon, and has light cover (+1 step penalty). In addition, because Jones is standing atop a moving train, you declare that the situation has a Good level of difficulty (+2 steps). By counting out the steps on the Situation Die Steps Scale, the Gamemaster determines that Jones has a final situation die of +d12. Michele rolls d20+d12, hoping to achieve a total that's equal to or less than Jones's pistol score. If she succeeds, then Jones hits his target, scoring either an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success, as detailed in the player's fast-play rules.

Eyeballing It

Situation Description	**Modifier**	**Situation Die**
Extremely easy	–3 steps	–d8
Very easy	–2 steps	–d6
Easy	–1 steps	–d4
Average	None	+d0
Tough	+1 step	+d4
Hard	+2 steps	+d6
Challenging	+3 steps	+d8

Eyeballing It: Dave's hero, Jack Martin, needs to slip past the customs official. Since Martin doesn't have the *sneak* specialty skill, his base situation die is +d4. You decide that the official is particularly vigilant today. This makes the situation Hard, causing Martin to take a +2 step penalty. Dave rolls d20+d8, hoping for a result equal to or less than Martin's Stealth skill score.

Running the Game

You can run a roleplaying game very easily by sticking to this one simple formula:

- Describe a scene to the players that demands some action on the part of their heroes.
- Ask the players what their heroes are going to do.
- Resolve the heroes' actions.
- Determine how the resolution of the heroes' action affected the original situation.
- Describe the updated situation to the players, and start the process all over again.

Don't worry; you don't have to make it all up on the fly. Usually, a Gamemaster has a script or a set of notes to work from that outlines the various scenes and situations that make up the adventure the heroes are currently engaged in. The adventure included with these fast-play rules is scripted so that all you have to do is follow the directions.

How does this work in practice? It's pretty easy. Let's say that the heroes are investigating the site of an alien abduction. First, the Gamemaster describes a lonely spot on the open prairie, marked only by a burnt circle on the ground and a set of tire tracks leading away. The Gamemaster then asks the players what their heroes are going to do. Each player decides what action his or her hero takes; one hero may collect a soil sample, another might stand guard to watch out for anyone else approaching, and a third player may declare that his hero will follow the tire tracks.

Next, the Gamemaster resolves the actions the players have declared. Taking the soil sample and standing guard are easy—the players don't have to make any rolls to succeed in those tasks. But following the tire tracks requires an Investigate–*track* skill check, so the Gamemaster asks the player to roll a skill check for his hero.

Finally, success or failure in the challenges of the scene may dictate a new situation—the tire tracks lead toward a distant mesa if the heroes can follow them. Now they have a new set of decisions to make; they can stay and search the area around the circle, or they can follow the tracks into a new scene.

The Adventure

An ALTERNITY adventure is nothing more than a series of distinc scenes in which the heroes are presented with a situation, deci what they want to do, resolve their actions, and deal with the co sequences. Each scene challenges the heroes with enemies t defeat, mysteries to solve, or supporting characters to interact wit

To continue with the previous example, let's say that the ad venture is simple: The heroes have been assigned to investigate an alien abduction. Scenes that might make up this adventure include the following:

- A search of the site where the abduction took place.
- An interview with the abductee when the victim is found again.
- A hostile encounter with secretive men in black who attempt to steal evidence the heroes have collected from the scene.
- An attack by angry locals who think that the heroes are somehow behind the abduction.
- A scene in which the abductee must be protected from the men in black or the aliens who originally kidnapped him.

Not all of these scenes might be necessary in the adventure; maybe the heroes never go out to the site of the encounter, or maybe they avoid the locals by driving away from a confrontation before it gets ugly. And, players being players, the Gamemaster might need to respond to their actions with new scenes that reflect the course of the heroes' investigation.

Many Gamemasters make up adventures for their players by thinking up a cool plot, jotting down some notes about the villains or challenges the heroes must defeat, and then creating a good scene to start the heroes in the story. You don't have to do that right away; for your first time as the Gamemaster, use the scripted adventure in this chapter.

The Scene Structure

Every time the players are faced by an obstacle, challenge, or significant encounter with a Gamemaster-controlled character, they're engaged in a scene. A scene is one piece of an adventure—a decision box in which the heroes might succeed, fail, or sidestep a problem altogether. There are three types of scenes: combat scenes, challenge scenes, and encounter scenes.

Combat Scenes

Most roleplaying games resemble action movies. The heroes frequently confront the villains with force and stop the bad guys the old-fashioned way. Even if the heroes aren't willing to use force against the villains, their enemies may not feel constrained to abide by the same restrictions. Ghosts or hostile entities might lash out at investigators; unknown assassins may try to kill heroes getting too close to the truth; ruthless agents might try to make the heroes disappear before the heroes expose their plots. Combat is commonplace in DARK•MATTER adventures.

Setting Up the Fight

The first thing you need to do in a combat scene is set up the fight. Decide who's attacking the heroes, and why they're doing it. Usually, your *adventure notes* can help you determine the opposition the heroes face.

For example, if you've already decided that a government lab is protected by a security team of four guards, it's pretty clear that the heroes must defeat or bypass all four guards to get inside. When you play the adventure later in this chapter, you will know exactly what the heroes may end up fighting against.

Decide where the opponents are in relation to the heroes. If the heroes just stormed a room full of armed gunmen, it's pretty clear that all the combatants are in the same room. If the heroes drive into an ambush on a bridge, you might determine that the gunmen are kneeling behind cars parked to block both lanes. Then describe to the players where their heroes and the bad guys are in relation to each other.

Finally, some situations may have the potential for surprise. If the heroes are relaxing in a hotel room after a long day of investigation when two assassins kick in the door, they might not be ready for a fight. Have each hero who might be caught off guard make an Awareness skill check; if the hero fails, she is surprised and can't take any actions in the first round of the fight.

Action Rounds

Scenes in which time is critical—gunfights, chases, disarming bombs—need a framework for deciding who goes first. The action round organizes the actions of the heroes and the supporting cast so that the Gamemaster can tell whose turn it is to act.

Every action round is divided into four phases: Amazing, Good, Ordinary, and Marginal. All characters involved in the scene make action checks before each round to determine which phase they may act in. Characters with Amazing action checks act first, then characters with Good action checks, then Ordinary, and finally Marginal.

Although actions in a phase occur simultaneously, you don't want everyone rolling dice at the same time. Instead, all characters who are entitled to an action in the same phase should act in the order of their action check scores—highest score first. The results of their actions (such as damage) are applied at the end of the phase, thus simulating simultaneous activity.

Example: Jones, Martin, and the cult leader all achieve Good action check results. Their action check scores are 13, 10, and 15, respectively. For ease of play, the cult leader acts first in the Good phase, followed by Jones, then Martin.

Attacks

There are three basic ways to attack a creature or a character in the ALTERNITY game system: bare-handed, with a melee weapon, or with a ranged weapon. When a hero chooses to attack an enemy character or hostile creature, he must attempt a skill check using the appropriate skill.

- Hand-to-hand attacks use the Unarmed Attack–*brawl* or *power martial arts* or the Acrobatics–*defensive martial arts* skills. If the character doesn't have any of these skills, he must make an untrained Strength feat check (use the "Untrained" Strength score and add a d4) to attack in hand-to-hand combat.
- Ranged weapon attacks use the Ranged Weapons–*pistol* or *rifle* skills. If the character doesn't have these skills, he must make an untrained Dexterity feat check to attack.

The Gamemaster may add step modifiers to the attack for the target's Strength or Dexterity, or to reflect a tricky situation—a long-range shot or good cover for the target. The result of the attack roll is a Failure (a miss), or an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success (all hits).

If a character hits his target, he inflicts damage appropriate to the success of his attack. For example, if Officer McDermott achieves an Ordinary success with her 9mm pistol, she inflicts d4+1 points of wound damage.

Damage

Damage comes in three types: stun, wound, and mortal. If a character is hit by an attack or some other damage-causing condition, the degree of success achieved by that attack determines the type and amount of *primary damage* suffered by a character.

- If a character loses all of his stun points, he's knocked out.
- If a character loses all of his wound points, he's knocked out and gravely injured.
- If a character loses all of his mortal points, he's dead.

Each of the hero templates in this chapter lists some examples of weapons and armor, and includes their important statistics.

Serious, lasting injuries—mortal damage and wound damage—cause secondary damage to the character who is injured. For every 2 points of wound damage inflicted on a character, that character also suffers 1 point of stun damage. For every 2 points of mortal damage a character receives, that character also suffers 1 point of wound damage and 1 point of stun damage.

Example: Wheeler fires his .38 pistol at a horrible ice-demon and gets an Amazing success on his attack roll. The damage for an Amazing success with the .38 pistol is d4m. Wheeler's player, Michele, rolls d4 and gets a result of 3. The ice-demon suffers 3 points of mortal damage (the primary damage of the attack) plus secondary damage of 1 wound and 1 stun.

Recovery

After a character suffers damage, he or she can get back to full health in a number of different ways:

- Stun damage disappears at the end of a scene.
- Wound damage, but not mortal damage, heals naturally at a rate of 2 wound points per week of rest and recuperation.
- The Knowledge–*first aid* specialty skill can heal stun damage on conscious patients, negating 2, 3, or 4 points of stun damage depending on the degree of success achieved on the skill check (Ordinary, Good, or Amazing).

First aid can also revive a character who was knocked out due to stun damage, restoring 1, 2, or 3 stun points depending on the degree of success. This skill can also be used to heal wound damage; any success restores 1 wound point.

- The Medical Science–*treatment* specialty skill can be used to heal stun damage on conscious patients, as per *first aid* above.

Medical Science–*treatment* can also be used to revive a character who was knocked out due to stun damage, restoring 2, 3, or 4 stun points depending on the degree of success.

This skill can be used to heal wound damage; any success restores 2 wound points.

- The Medical Science–*surgery* specialty skill can heal wound damage and mortal damage; a success restores 1 point of mortal and 2 points of wound damage. This skill can be used on a specific patient once every hour. Note that using the *surgery* skill requires the kind of facilities normally found at a hospital—anesthesia, monitoring devices, and so on.

Armor

Aliens, paranormal creatures, and some human characters may possess armor that protects them from the dangers of battle. Armor can reduce the primary damage a hero suffers—but armor has no effect on secondary damage.

Example: Dave's character, Officer McDermott, is wearing her Kevlar vest when a crazed cultist shoots her for 5 points of wound damage. That also causes 2 points of secondary stun damage, which Dave records on the hero template immediately because armor doesn't stop secondary damage. Now Dave rolls to see how well McDermott's armor protected her from the wound damage. The vest blocks d6–2 points of high impact (HI) damage. Dave rolls a d6 and gets a result of 4, for a total of 2 (4 – 2), so the number of wounds is reduced by 2. Dave marks off 3 wound boxes on Officer McDermott's character template (5 – 2 = 3).

Challenge Scenes

Not every threat or obstacle involves a villain with a gun. Heroes routinely scale cliffs, search for hard-to-find clues, try to repair damaged machinery, or use their wits and training to get to the bottom of things. Any time the story hinges on whether or not a hero can successfully use a skill in a non-combat situation, you're dealing with a challenge scene.

Typical challenge scenes include the following:

- Using Athletics–*climb* or *jump* to scale a difficult obstacle.
- Using Manipulation–*lockpick* to get around a locked door.
- Using Stealth–*shadow* or *sneak* to trail someone without being spotted or slip past a guard without a fight.
- Using Medical Science–*treatment* to help an injured character.
- Using Technical Science–*repair* to fix a piece of damaged machinery.
- Using Lore–*occult lore* or *psychic lore* to analyze paranormal phenomena and discern a cause.
- Using Investigate–*search* or *track* to glean a clue from a crime scene or find someone who doesn't want to be found.

In fact, any time the players want to try to use their heroes' skills to advance the story in some way, it's a challenge scene. The adventure in this chapter includes several potential challenge scenes with guidelines on how you should handle them as they come up.

The basic procedure for a challenge scene is simple. Ask the players what skill they want their heroes to use. Determine whether there are factors that make the skill check easier or more difficult, add the appropriate step modifiers to the skill check, and then ask the players to make skill checks for their heroes. Evaluate the results and apply them to the situation.

Many challenges are very short. If a hero is trying to jump onto a moving train, she gets one shot at it and succeeds or fails. Other challenges may be broken up into a number of distinct steps; for example, climbing a mountain may require a

number of Athletics–*climb* skill checks to conquer each stage of the ascent.

Example: Tom's character, Donna Truitt, is trying to slip a tracking device into an enemy agent's pocket in a quiet coffee shop. The skill most appropriate to the situation is Manipulate–*pickpocket*. The Gamemaster decides that, since the place is almost empty, it's hard for Donna to get close without being very obvious about it. He assigns a +2 step penalty, and then adds another +1 step penalty since the enemy agent has a high Will score and a +1 step resistance modifier. (Will represents how perceptive a character is, among other things.) Tom rolls a *pickpocket* skill check on a d20 + d8 and gets a Good success. Not only did Donna plant the tracker, but she hid it in such a way that the enemy agent isn't likely to find it for a while.

Encounter Scenes

An encounter scene describes a conversation or interaction between two characters—a hero and a member of the supporting cast. Two heroes don't make up an encounter scene, since the players who control those heroes are free to talk to each other any time they like. Similarly, two supporting cast members don't have encounter scenes, since the players don't necessarily get the chance to see what happens when the mob boss talks to his underling.

Not every meeting between a hero and a character under the Gamemaster's control should be construed as an encounter scene. Presumably, heroes are real people in a real world. They chat with the cashier at the grocery store, they talk to the other people taking the train they're riding, and they pass by dozens or hundreds of strangers every day as they go about their business. But only a handful of these chance encounters have anything at all to do with the story at hand. In fact, an encounter is worth a scene only if the hero can learn or do something important in the course of that encounter.

Typical encounter scenes include the following:

- Deceiving a gate guard by pretending to have a pass to get into a restricted area.
- Convincing a police officer not to take the hero into custody under suspicious circumstances.
- Conversing with a rival agent in a social situation and trying to get some information out of him.
- Interviewing a witness to a UFO encounter.
- Persuading an authority figure to quarantine an area exposed to an alien virus.
- Convincing a bystander to help the heroes in a dangerous or illegal act.

There are two ways to resolve an encounter scene. The first is the easiest: common sense. If the players say something that sounds convincing to you, the Gamemaster, you can simply rule that their heroes convinced the character they were talking to. Characters in the game should act and react the way real people in the same situation would, so use your best judgment.

The second way to resolve an encounter scene is to ask the players to make a skill check using the appropriate Personality-based skill—Deception, Interaction, or Leadership. If a hero is pretending to be someone else to get past a guard, Deception–*bluff* is probably the best skill to use. If the hero is threatening the guard with imminent violence, Interaction–*intimidate* is more appropriate. Ask the player to tell you what his or her hero is saying, and then apply a step bonus or penalty to reflect how effective the player's tactic seems to be in the current situation. Then call for a skill check and evaluate the results.

Example: John's hero, Dr. Akens, is trying to persuade a beat cop to let him leave the scene of a murder without arresting him. This sounds pretty tough, but the Gamemaster asks John what Dr. Akens says to get out of this situation. "I'm telling the cop that I saw the murderer run off in another direction just a moment ago so that I can leave when the police officer goes to investigate," John says.

The Gamemaster decides that the skill this reflects is probably Deception–*bluff*, and that Dr. Akens's approach is weak but not too bad—a +1 step penalty to a Deception skill check is reasonable. Unfortunately, Akens doesn't have the Deception skill, so John must make an untrained Personality skill check for Dr. Akens. He rolls a d20 + d6 (a +1 step penalty for the broad skill check, and the +1 step penalty for the weak argument) and compares it to Akens's Deception skill score. John blows the roll—the cop holds Akens and refuses to let him leave the scene before he can question the good doctor.

Supporting Cast

Each of the players controls only one hero at any given time. The Gamemaster controls all the other characters in the adventure. The most important supporting cast member is the major antagonist. A good villain helps to set the mood of a story and can even become a more-or-less permanent part of the campaign—a recurring figure whose plots and agents constantly threaten the heroes or whatever they hold dear.

Supporting cast members include the major villain; his or her associates and hired hands; the authority figures who command or employ the heroes; the informants, witnesses, and shop owners the heroes interact with; and the valued friends, hirelings, and allies ready to help the heroes at a moment's notice. The Gamemaster needs to be ready to run these characters as they are called upon, or to improvise as the need arises.

It's important for the Gamemaster to give each supporting cast member—especially major opponents and allies—much the same consideration players give their heroes.

Some supporting cast members should be fully developed, with a complete set of skills and vital game statistics. Other characters, such as minor opponents, experts, and bystanders, need only the skill scores and statistics that might come into play during a scene. For example, give a common thug a combat skill or two, durability ratings, and a weapon; give an expert just the skill scores needed to use his expertise on the heroes' behalf.

Roleplaying 101

The best part about controlling the supporting cast is that you can create different personalities during the course of play. Ham it up, play it straight, or go for the dramatic—depending on the mood of the adventure and the personality of the character.

Heroes and Encounter Skills

Villains routinely threaten, cajole, bluster, or rail at the heroes. However, they're not entitled to make Interaction–*intimidate* or Deception–*bribe* skill checks to make the heroes back off or accept a payoff. When a supporting character wants the heroes to do something, it's your job as Gamemaster to convey the character's threat or offer—and then allow the players to decide if their heroes listen.

Of course, there may be consequences to ignoring a threat or insulting a character who's trying to deal with the heroes. It's reasonable for you to point out to the players what these consequences might be, but you shouldn't ever take control of the heroes' actions.

Presenting an Adventure

A roleplaying game's action takes place in an adventure. Within its structure, the participants create the group story. The Gamemaster's role in the adventure centers around narrating the story, portraying supporting cast members, and moving the story along at a satisfying pace.

Narration

The heroes need to be involved in a story during which they act, react, and create a riveting tale. A story consists of a beginning, a middle, and an end, and each one should be filled with conflicts and goals—in other words, obstacles for the heroes to overcome and objectives for them to achieve. It's up to the Gamemaster to have the basics of a story ready when the game session begins.

Remember, though, that the story will be completed by the group—through the actions of the heroes and their interaction with your supporting cast. The heroes play an important part in determining how a story takes shape, and you should make sure their decisions play a part in the process.

You must develop a basic plot (or use a plot from a published product), provide motivations and objectives for the heroes, and have an exciting idea for the ending. A plot requires enough background material so that the story feels like it fits the campaign setting. Other elements that make a good basic plot include a major antagonist (the villain), the antagonist's nefarious scheme, and motivations to make the heroes want to get involved. These elements come together in the adventure's opening scene—called the trigger.

The "Exit 23" adventure (detailed below) provides an example of how these elements work together.

Pacing

Another aspect of presenting an adventure is the pacing of the story. The story shouldn't artificially push the heroes to meet some schedule. Instead, watch how the scenes play out. When a scene starts to drag and the fun factor begins to flag, that's when you step in to give the scene a boost. How? By using the resources at your disposal—maybe have a supporting character show up with some tip that gives the heroes a nudge in the right direction. If your players don't know what to do next and the story is in danger of stalling, it's up to you to give it new life.

Don't create an adventure outline that's so complete that the heroes can't make any decisions without violating your plot. Start the adventure with action and have lots of other action ideas ready to insert into the flow as the game session progresses. Use combat, challenges, encounters, conflict, tension, humor, and mystery to keep an adventure moving toward its dramatic conclusion.

The basic rule for pacing is that as long as the players are having fun, stay in the current scene. When the action bogs down, then the Gamemaster must help the pacing by getting things moving again.

Moderating the Rules

The player's section of the fast-play rules gives you the basic facts about how the ALTERNITY game works. That's all you need to introduce your players to the game system and run the adventure in this section. In play, it's up to the Gamemaster to moderate the game so that everyone has fun, plays fair, and is challenged. Of all these, the emphasis is always on fun. If a rule gets in the way of everyone's enjoyment, change it. But change it consistently and after consideration. Don't change a rule just for the sake of change.

Final decisions are always left to the Gamemaster. Can the heroes perform a particular action? Can they even try it? That's up to you. Make your decision based on the need to keep the story moving, your interpretation of the rules, and whether or not the action fits the story and increases everyone's enjoyment of the game. Be fair and impartial in your treatment of heroes and supporting characters. Challenge the players and their heroes. The players want to see their heroes tested and to experience the thrill of competing against the odds and coming out on top. Heroes do this sort of thing all the time! Just make sure the players have decisions to make and options to choose from as the adventure unfolds.

If someone disagrees with a decision, call a time out and discuss it with the group. You still get to make the final call, but you can reduce the possibility of hard feelings if you moderate the game fairly. The goal is to tell a good group story and to have fun, not to abuse the heroes.

Sometimes the dice just fall the wrong way. That's okay. But you might want to give the players a break now and then. After all, it's no fun for a player to lose a hero in a stupid and random way. Be lenient when determining the difficulty of a particular action, or change the result before revealing the outcome to the players. This sort of manipulation is the Gamemaster's prerogative, but use it sparingly—and always in the interest of keeping the story moving and the fun factor high.

EXIT 23

An Introductory DARK•MATTER Adventure

"Exit 23" is a short adventure designed to introduce you to the ALTERNITY game and the DARK•MATTER setting. If you're a brand-new Gamemaster, the first thing you need to do is read through the adventure before you run your first game. You

should know how each scene fits into the the adventure so that you can present each scene in the best and most exciting manner possible.

Familiarize yourself with the fast-play rules earlier in this chapter. The other players expect you to know how the game works, so make sure that you at least know where to find the answers to any questions that come up. Finally, you should take a minute to look over the hero templates so that you know what kind of heroes your players are controlling in the game.

When you're ready to start playing, assign each player one of the templates. You can choose randomly, or you can tell the players about each hero and ask them which one they want to play. Flip a coin if two players want to run the same hero. (We recommend that you make photocopies of the hero templates to hand out to everyone.) If you have extra templates left over, you might consider running these extra heroes as supporting cast members.

Ask the players to read over their templates and answer any questions they may have about them. The best way to learn the game is by playing, though, so just explain the basics and then get on with the adventure. Most players catch on as you go along.

If you're not the Gamemaster for this game, stop reading here. It's no fun when someone tells you how the movie ends before you see it, and it's no fun to know how the adventure proceeds before you play it.

Adventure Background

Don't read this to the players! This is a brief background of what's happening in this adventure. We'll let you know how to start the game for the players a bit later.

The Hoffmann Institute is an organization devoted to investigating and understanding all kinds of paranormal phenomena. The Institute operates from more than a dozen major offices around the world, dispatching professional investigators to check out reports of ghosts, hauntings, UFOs, mysterious creatures, real magic, and the activities of secret organizations and conspiracies.

Several days ago, agents working for the Institute investigated an old estate formerly owned by a reputed cult leader and diabolist named Michel Galvin. Galvin disappeared about ten years ago, and distant relatives finally sold his manor to wash their hands of the whole business. Hoffmann agent Jonas Riley, who'd been keeping tabs on the old Galvin place, heard of the upcoming estate sale and visited the site to make sure that it was free of Michel Galvin's sinister influence before it was sold to some unsuspecting person.

Riley and his team examined the place in detail, discovering a secret laboratory or conjuration room hidden in the manor's attic. The room was mostly empty, but Riley found an evil artifact concealed in a secret drawer —a snow globe with magical powers. Neither Riley nor anyone else on his team knew what to

make of Galvin's globe, so Riley took it to an Institute expert in Portland, Oregon, for a thorough examination and safekeeping.

Unknown to Riley, other people besides the Hoffmann Institute have been keeping an eye on Galvin's mansion. Galvin's circle of acolytes, *Les Trieze Corbins* (The Thirteen Crows) still exists, and they still watch Galvin's place. They'd searched the grounds several times for the globe but never found the secret drawer. When Riley discovered the globe and removed it from the mansion, *Les Trieze Corbins* wanted it back. They sent Jacob Dumont, one of their number, after Riley to retrieve the globe.

Dumont trailed Riley from Galvin's estate in Montana into the rugged mountain country of the Idaho panhandle. But Dumont isn't alone. With spells learned from Galvin years ago, the cultists conjured a winter-demon and created a vicious blizzard to close the highway and trap Riley at a lonely rest stop in the middle of the night. This allowed Dumont to catch up with Riley.

Overview

What does all of this have to do with the players? The answer is simple: Their heroes are caught at the rest stop along with Riley and Dumont, and it's up to them to stop the sadistic cultist from killing everyone and escaping with Galvin's sinister artifact.

The beginning of the adventure finds the heroes stranded in a rest stop on I-90, near Exit 23 in Idaho. They're on the road for various reasons of their own; for example, Officer McDermott is patrolling this stretch of highway, while Donna Truitt is just driving back to her home in Seattle from whatever business she was engaged in before the start of the adventure. Most of the heroes don't know each other; they're just travelers stranded by a sudden snowstorm.

The adventure opens when the heroes discover that someone or something has attacked several other travelers in another part of the building, killing one person and seriously injuring another (Jonas Riley, although the players don't know who he is or what he's doing there when their heroes find him). The adventure should proceed through seven distinct scenes, as shown below:

Scene 1: A Grisly Discovery. The heroes learn that they're not alone in the rest stop and that something waits in the storm.

Scene 2: Danny Wood. The heroes interview the only witness to the winter-demon's attack and learn something about what they're up against.

Scene 3: Who Goes There? The winter-demon lashes out at anyone who tries to track it into the storm and drives the heroes back inside.

Scene 4: Smoke 'em Out: The cultist, Dumont, drives everyone in the rest stop outside so that the demon can make short work of them. He starts a fire that the heroes must extinguish, or they'll have to abandon the tenuous safety of the rest stop.

Scene 5: Firebug. The heroes discover that Dumont lit the fire, and they capture him.

Scene 6: *Les Trieze Corbins*. The heroes question Dumont to learn more about what they're up against and why he's after Riley.

Scene 7: Fire and Ice. The heroes determine that the only way to survive the storm is to destroy the demon. Arming themselves with improvised weapons, they lure the demon into a final confrontation.

Of course, the adventure may not follow this exact path. Your players will think of dozens of things to try that don't have anything to do with the script. Your job as Gamemaster is to treat each of these improvisations fairly and sensibly, using

White River Rest Stop

While truckers and locals know it better as the Exit 23 rest stop, the name on the lobby identifies the place as the White River Station. It's located between the eastbound and westbound lanes, and there is a turnoff here for a lonely mountain road that runs about ten miles to the closest town, White River. At the moment, none of the roads is even close to being passable due to the accumulation of snow and the lack of visibility.

The heroes may explore the rest stop anytime they like. In fact, since the adventure assumes that they've been here for a couple of hours before the action starts, you can pretty much tell the players anything they want to know about what's where—their heroes have seen the whole place by now.

1. Vestibule and Phones: The main entrance. There are two phones here, neither of which is working.

2. Lobby: A large, open room featuring an information counter (never staffed), two wall displays with flyers for local tourist attractions, and a big wall map of Idaho.

3. Women's Room: A typical rest room.

4. Men's Room: A typical rest room.

5. Arcade: This alcove contains six coin-operated video games.

6. Convenience Store: A small, cluttered shop loaded with knickknacks, caffeine pills, road maps, and souvenirs. The store is closed, and the lobby entrance is blocked by a roll-down grate. Anne Banks, the cashier, is waiting out the storm in the donut shop. She'll open the store if anyone wants to buy something.

7. Storerooms: These are typical stockrooms filled with the supplies needed by the rest stop businesses. All feature large , locked sheet-metal doors leading outside.

8. The Donut Shop: A small shop with a counter, stools by the counter, and a couple of small booths. The shop serves coffee, donuts, breakfast sandwiches, and other light fare. Most of the people in the rest stop have gathered here.

9. Restaurant: A McDonald's that is closed for the night. A pull-down grate covers the counter window, but the seating area is open.

10. Kitchen: The kitchen for the McDonald's. It's crowded with stoves, fryers, and several large refrigerators.

11. Fuel Office: The cashier's stand for the gas station. Ahmed Singh, the cashier, has shut down the pumps and the office everyone else in the donut shop.

what you know about the plot as a guideline for whether or not the player's idea will work.

Players' Introduction

When you're ready to start playing, read or paraphrase the text in the box below to the players. This lets them know where their heroes are and what they're doing when the adventure begins.

You've never seen a snowstorm like this. October in the Idaho mountains can be bad, but for hours now it's been a virtual white-out. The snow must be at least fifteen inches deep on the highway, and the weather's showing no signs of breaking.

It's close to midnight now, but you've been stranded since sundown in a small interstate rest stop, waiting for the plows to come through so that you can get back on the road. A half-dozen motorists share your predicament, plus four or five rest stop employees who have stayed on to serve coffee and food for the duration of the storm.

Each of you has places to go and things to do, but for now you're all stuck here. No one's driving anywhere tonight, and no one's coming to get you out. Some of you have passed the time with a paperback novel or a magazine, while others have been chatting with the other motorists.

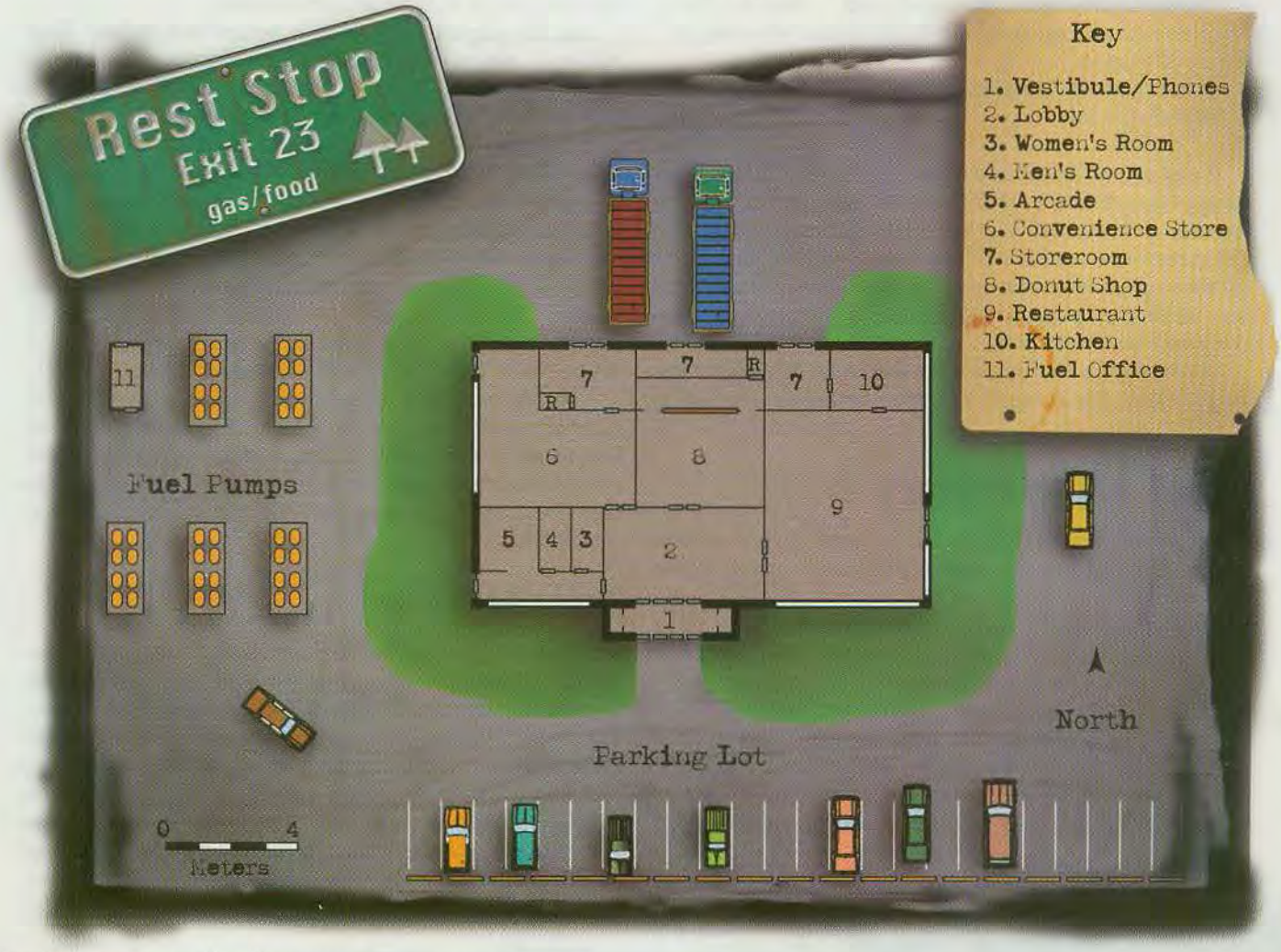
Ask the players to introduce their heroes for the game. Have the players state their heroes' names, describe their general appearance, and maybe even say something about where their heroes were going when the snowstorm set in.

Answer any questions the players have about the situation or the people around them. Here are a couple of the most likely questions you'll get:

What does this place look like? It's an interstate rest stop. You can use the map to explain the general layout of the place. The heroes have been stuck here long enough to look around a little.

Who else is here? In addition to the heroes, a number of supporting characters are at the Exit 23 rest stop. You'll play these characters as the Gamemaster.

- A balding business executive of about 50, wearing a good suit and a conservative overcoat (Jonas Riley).
- A short, stocky lady truck driver wearing a flannel shirt and a sheepskin vest (Norma Thomson).
- A long-haired college student with John Lennon glasses, an Army jacket, and a sketchbook filled with Gigeresque drawings (John Black).
- A matronly waitress of about sixty years who runs the donut shop (Mabel Adams).
- A big, beefy truck driver in a cheap parka and a black ball cap (Jacob Dumont).
- A teenage kid with long hair and an apron who does the



short-order cooking in the restaurant (Danny Wood, the witness in Scene 1).
- A pretty teenage girl who runs the register in the convenience store (Anne Banks).
- A young man with South Asian or Indian features who runs the gas station (Ahmed Singh).

Why can't I just keep driving? Your players may hail from someplace like Georgia or Florida, and they might find it hard to believe that a snowstorm could close a major highway. If any hero tries it, he or she gets about a mile so down the highway and drives into a ditch. It takes a long, cold walk to get back to the rest stop, and then you can continue with the adventure.

Okay, so what do we do now? Tell your players to wait a minute while you finish the introduction, and then they can tell you what their heroes are doing.

You're sitting in the donut shop, nursing a cup of coffee, when the lights flicker. "Oh, great," mutters Mabel, the counter waitress—and then the lights go out altogether. Somewhere on the other side of the rest stop you hear a door slam open, followed by a vicious blast of freezing cold air that somehow finds its way over to where you sit. The wind howls like something alive, scratching and clawing at you with an icy grasp.

Without even thinking about it, you abruptly realize that something is horribly, terribly wrong. Then you hear an awful racket from the direction of the rest rooms—violent blows, choking cries, breaking glass, and finally one more high-pitched scream that makes your blood run cold.

The wind howls again, more doors slam . . . and then the room becomes still again, except for the distant whistling of the storm outside.

"What in heaven was that?" Mabel says in the darkness.

What do you do?

If any player thinks to ask, tell him or her that the following characters are not in the donut shop at the moment: the executive, the cook, and the guy in the Army jacket. (The gas station and convenience store cashiers shut down their stations and joined everyone in the donut shop.) People have been coming and going all night, so it's not unusual that several aren't here right now.

If your players don't know what else to do, encourage them to investigate the screams from the rest rooms. Proceed to Scene 1.

Scene 1: A Grisly Discovery

When the heroes investigate the screams and sounds of struggle they heard earlier, read or paraphrase the text below:

The last gust of wind seems to have knocked out power to the rest stop. There's just enough illumination from various emergency lights to carefully move through the darkened building. Wind screams outside, howling past an open door or broken window clattering shrilly somewhere out of sight.

At the rest room, a body is sprawled in the doorway. It's the young man in the Army jacket, and he's quite dead. Several needle-sharp icicles as long as swords impale the corpse, now surrounded by a puddle of slick scarlet ice. He seems to have been stabbed through the back as he left the rest room.

Inside the men's room, you find another body—the executive. Like the guy at the door, he's transfixed by several icicles, but while you watch, he groans and stirs. "Help me," he gasps. "So . . . cold . . ."

The dead man is John Black. He's beyond any help the heroes can give. The executive is Jonas Riley. He's been badly injured, impaled through the thigh, upper arm, and side, but by pure chance the icicles missed killing him.

This is a challenge scene, with the following challenges for the heroes to resolve: help Riley; make some deductions about what happened from the first look at the scene; search the scene for hidden clues; and search the surrounding areas. Ask the players what their heroes do, but suggest some of these options if necessary.

Helping Riley

Riley's game statistics don't really matter in this adventure. He's sustained several points of mortal damage in the attack, which means that he'll be unconscious and helpless for the balance of the adventure. It also means that he dies if he doesn't get help.

To stabilize Riley and keep him from dying, a hero must succeed in a skill check using one of the following skills: Knowledge–*first aid* or Medical Science–*treatment*.

Ask the players which of their heroes tries to help Riley. Add a +1 step penalty to reflect the difficulty of working on Riley's injuries in the dark, but ignore the penalty if the heroes provide some light for the doctor to work with.

Remember, to make a skill check, you'll ask the player to roll a d20 and a d0, d4, or d6 (for a +0, +1, or +2 step penalty), adding the results together. If the result is less than or equal to the hero's skill score for Knowledge–*first aid* or Medical Science–*treatment*, she succeeds in stabilizing Riley and preventing his death for now. If the skill check fails, Riley's condition worsens. The hero may make one more skill check at a +2 step penalty to stabilize the agent, and if this fails, Riley dies. (It's not critical to the adventure for Riley to survive.)

Depending on which heroes the players chose to play, there may not be any heroes present who know first aid or medicine. Remember, you can allow a hero to make an untrained skill check using his untrained Intelligence score to help Riley. The hero will probably fail, since this is a very difficult roll, but at least he can try.

Checking Out the Scene

If any player tells you that her hero is just looking around or trying to figure out what happened here, ask for an Awareness–*perception* or Investigate–*search* skill check for the hero. The result of this skill check indicates which of the clues noted below the hero notices. Any hero who looks around the scene sees that the stalls are empty, a trash can stands against one wall, and a condom dispenser hangs on the other wall. The mirror behind the sink has been holed and broken, and ice standing in the sink seems to have frozen right out of the faucet.

With a Marginal or better success, the hero notices that a fine layer of frost covers the entire room. This was not present the last time one of the heroes visited the facility; the rest room is much colder than it should be. (Most heroes notice this.)

An Ordinary or better success also allows the hero to note that no icicles large enough to kill someone have formed anywhere on the building, and certainly not in the rest room.

If the hero achieves a Good or better success, she realizes that Riley's attacker most likely hit him from the front, probably as he stood near the sink, judging by the blood splatters on the wall.

Finally, with an Amazing success, a hero also notices that Riley's coat hangs on a hook on the wall, but no other personal belongings from either victim are in sight.

Hidden Clues

Heroes who search the scene in detail for anything of interest may attempt an Investigate–*search* skill check.

An Ordinary success allows a hero to find Riley's valise stashed in the trash can underneath a layer of paper debris. It contains some papers (summed up in the sidebar below) and the snow globe. If the player indicates that his hero is specifically checking the trash can, he automatically finds this. (Riley stashed it here when the demon burst in, suspecting that he—or, more specifically, the globe—was the target.)

A Good or Amazing success allows the hero to find a footprint in the puddle of blood surrounding John Black's body. It seems to be the print of a large wolf or maybe a small bear.

Searching the Area

When the winter-demon attacked Riley and Black, Danny Wood was playing video games in the arcade next door. He got a good look at the creature, which scared him out of his wits. He's currently hiding behind an Asteroids game at the back of the arcade.

To find Danny, the heroes need to look around the corridor, lobby, and arcade—in other words, they need to look around outside the rest room as well as inside it. If a player tells you that his hero is examining the hallway, skip ahead to Scene 2.

If the players don't think to look around the area, you can cheat a little bit by telling the players that the heroes hear a clunk or scraping sound in the arcade.

Scene 2: Danny Wood

When the heroes check out the hallway outside the rest room, read the text below to the players:

> The corridor outside the rest room is dark and cold. At the end of the hallway, a door leading outside swings in the vicious, gusting wind, banging loudly against the wall. Fingers of swirling snow already dust the floor near the open door.
>
> To your right, the building's arcade is a dark cavern, with the normal chatter of video action silenced by the loss of power. Suddenly, there's a small rustling from somewhere inside, like something moving around in there.
>
> What do you do?

Play this up as a situation that may be dangerous—as far as the heroes know, the murderer could be hiding in here. Of course, it's only Danny Wood, hiding in the back of the room. But the heroes must go into the dark arcade (or at least call out) without knowing exactly what's in here. A good horror game involves an occasional tension-building scene that does not actually endanger anybody.

When the heroes identify themselves, challenge the occupant of the room, or just go in and look around, continue with the text below:

> Slowly and carefully, someone dressed in a fast-food uniform and apron stands up from behind a video game. It's the kid from the McDonald's, and he's obviously scared out his wits. "Please tell me it's gone," he says in a weak voice. "I don't know what it was, but I was sure it was gonna kill me."
>
> He looks around, panic growing in his eyes, and then starts for the door. "Man, I gotta get out of here!"

This is an encounter scene. Danny Wood is the only conscious witness to the killing, but he flees outside to his car and tries to drive away if the heroes don't calm him down and find out what happened.

Keeping Him Here

The first step is to prevent Danny from running off. Ask the players whether the heroes let him leave. The heroes can restrain him physically (a hand on the shoulder is enough to stop him), or they can try to calm him down.

Calm Him Down: A successful Interaction or Interaction–*charm* skill check calms Danny.

Threaten Him: A successful Interaction or Interaction–*intimidate* skill check scares Danny enough to keep him here. Add a –2 step bonus if an obvious authority figure (Officer McDermott or anybody flashing a gun) makes the attempt.

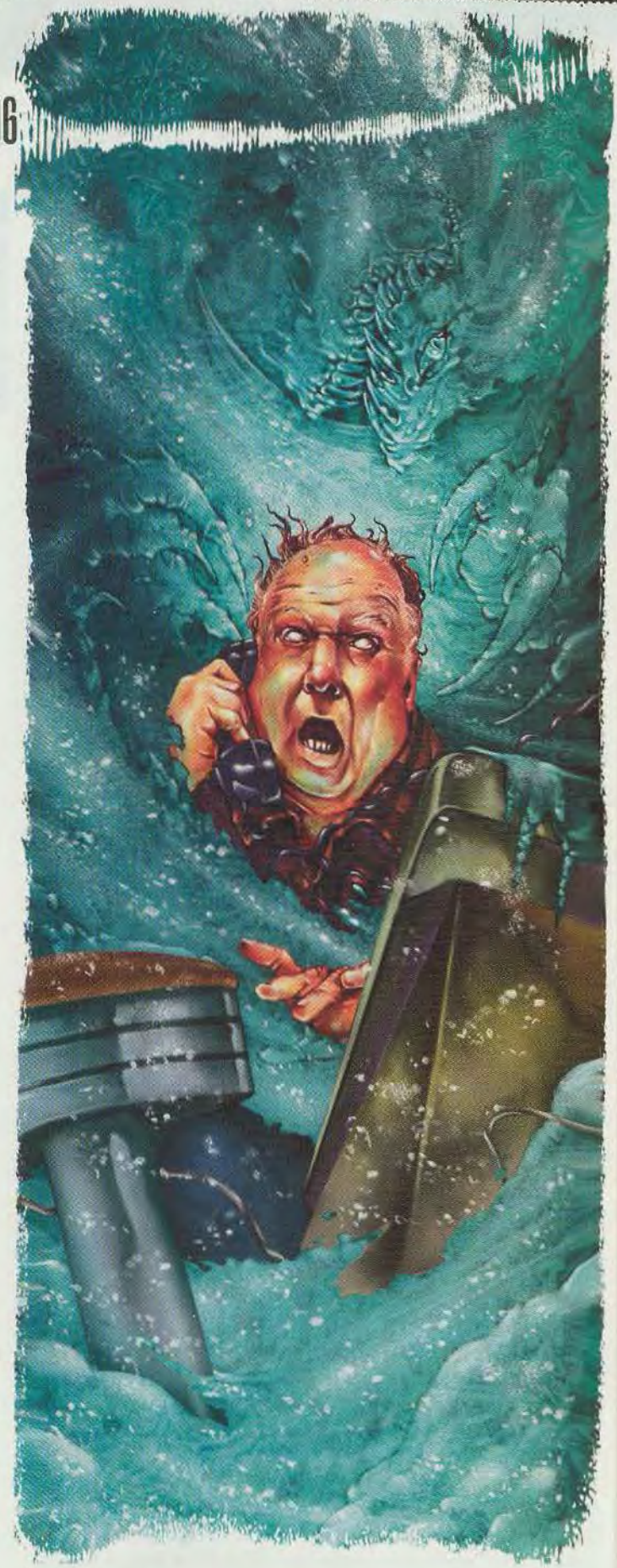
The Snow Globe and Riley's Notes

Jonas Riley's briefcase is stashed in the trash can in the men's room. If the heroes find the briefcase and examine its contents, they'll find the snow globe and Riley's notes about the device and how he found it.

The snow globe is a simple glass sphere about 10 centimeters (4 inches) in diameter. At the moment, it contains a small representation of the rest stop where the heroes are sheltering against the storm, and the tiny flakes flurry downward without ever settling—you don't have to shake the globe to make the snow fall.

The globe is remarkably resistant to breakage and won't crack if dropped, thrown against a wall, or struck a good hard blow. (There is a way to destroy the globe, though the heroes shouldn't discover it at this point. See Scene 7.)

Riley's notes about the snow globe take about half an hour to read. If any hero takes the time to study them, take that player aside and sum up the information that appears in the "Adventure Background" heading. Omit any mention of Jacob Dumont, since Riley doesn't know that Dumont followed him.



Winter-Demon

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	14	7	+2 steps
Dexterity	11	5	+1 step
Constitution	12	6	
Intelligence	8	4	
Will	12	6	+1 step
Personality	9	4	

Action Check Score: 15+/14/7/3

1–3	Amazing	8–14	Ordinary
4–7	Good	15+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 12	○○○○○○○○○○○○
Wound 12	○○○○○○○○○○○○
Mortal 6	○○○○○○

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Claws	16/8/4	Personal	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4+1m	LI
Icicles**	12/6/3	4/8/12	d4w/d4+2w/d6+2w	HI

* +1 step penalty for medium range, +2 steps for long

** The demon can throw three icicles at one time, making three attack rolls at a +1, +2, and +3 step penalty, respectively.

Armor

Hide*	d4+2 (LI)	d4+1 (HI)	d4–1 (En)

* The demon's armor is of Good quality. Damage rolled from physical attacks degrade by one type before secondary damage is assigned or armor is checked. Consequently, if a hero inflicts mortal damage on the winter-demon, it becomes wound damage. Similarly, wound damage becomes stun damage. If a hero inflicts stun damage (for instance, from a punch), the winter-demon ignores the damage.

Special

The winter-demon can use its action to dissolve into a cloud of ice and snow that can't be affected by any damage except fire, although this prevents the creature from attacking. It can resume its physical form by spending another action to do so.

The demon gains a –1 step bonus to its action checks and a +1 step increase to its Strength and Dexterity resistance modifiers while it is outside in the snowstorm.

The demon can use an action to create a minor supernatural effect (flickering lights, frightening sounds, gusts of wind) within 10 meters. This requires a successful Will feat check.

Background/Personality

The winter-demon is a powerful, malevolent entity from another dimension. Jacob Dumont's fellow cultists conjured it to kill Jonas Riley and retrieve the snow globe, and it obeys Dumont's commands. The creature can shift between two body forms at will. The first is a large, wolflike biped with claws of ice and a gaping jaw filled with needle-sharp fangs; the demon can make physical attacks in this form.

The second form is a cloud of snow, ice, and wind. In cloud-form, the demon can't attack, but it can't be harmed by any force except fire. In cloud-form, the demon can fly at a rate of about 100 kilometers per hour (or 400 meters per round).

The winter-demon is very resistant to normal physical attacks, but magical attacks, fire, and silver weapons can harm it. Attacks of these types do not downgrade in effect.

Get Him Talking: A successful Interaction or Interaction–*interview* skill check gets Danny talking about what he saw and distracts him.

"It's Out There": If any hero points out that the killer is outside now, Danny abandons the notion of going for his car. No skill check is necessary.

Finding Out What He Saw

Even if the heroes keep Danny on the scene, the cook is very shaken up right now. The sight of Black's body by the entrance to the men's room panics him even more. With the first few questions the heroes ask, Danny just mumbles things like "I dunno" and "Oh, man, it just killed that guy!"

To get some better information from their witness, the heroes need to ask the right questions. Have the hero speaking to Danny make a successful Interaction–*interview* skill check (Dr. Akens is good at it) to dig out the following facts. Make one check per question, but you can apply a –2 step bonus if the heroes calmed him down or got him talking first.

What happened? "I was over here playing Asteroids when the lights went out. I started to walk out of the arcade, and suddenly the door flew open in the hallway. A big blast of snow and ice came in, and there was something in the middle of the snow—a big white wolf or animal or something."

What did it do? "It went right past me and into the men's room. I looked around the corner, and I saw the dead guy come staggering out, with those icicles sticking in him. I heard someone else yell, and then it came back out again. It looked at the dead guy, and then it left."

Where did it go? "The wolf-thing stopped right there, there where you're standing, and looked right at me. I think it was telling me it coulda killed me if it wanted to. Then it blew apart into snow and ice, and it flew back out the door again. It's outside somewhere."

What did it look like, exactly? "I don't know, mister. It wasn't like anything I've ever seen before. It was part ice, part wind, part animal. It had claws of ice, and eyes that glowed red. It howled, too, just like the wind, but there were a thousand voices in it, saying stuff in some language I don't know. I hope to God I never see it again."

You can allow the players to grill Danny for as long as they like, but the cook doesn't know anything more.

Do I Know Anything About This?

After looking over the murder scene and talking to Danny, your players may ask if their heroes have any knowledge of supernatural entities or murders with this kind of MO (*modus operandi*). Most of the heroes described in the templates simply have had no exposure to this kind of happening before. There are two exceptions, though: Officer McDermott and Dr. Akens.

Officer McDermott: If the player running McDermott asks whether she's heard of any similar killings lately, ask the player to make a Law–*enforcement* skill check. If the check succeeds, McDermott realizes that there have been no other killings like this in the area.

Dr. Akens: The player running Dr. Akens may ask if he knows anything about this. Ask him to make a Lore–*occult lore* skill check (add a –2 step bonus if Dr. Akens has read through Riley's notes on Galvin's snow globe). If successful, Akens can draw the following conclusions from the evidence at hand:

- If Galvin was a diabolist (an evil sorcerer), the creature that attacked Riley and Black may have been some kind of demon. Such things come in many varieties, and ice-demons or winter-demons have been described in some obscure occult texts.
- Demons or spirits are often bound to specific missions or tasks, such as the destruction of a particular person or the recovery of a specific object.
- Demons may be invulnerable to normal weapons, but sometimes possess other weaknesses—a susceptibility to silver weapons, fear of bright light, and so on.

Scene 3: Who Goes There?

At this point, the heroes are probably studying the murder scene, examining Riley's briefcase, talking to Danny Wood, and working to make Riley comfortable. The winter-demon realizes that it still hasn't accomplished its mission, and it lures people outside.

Begin this scene when Scene 2 is starting to finish up. You could also start this scene anytime a hero ventures outside into the storm.

> The wind howls outside, and the snow continues to fall. The building is dark and cold, with icy gusts reaching into every corner of the structure. Mabel, the lady running the donut shop, has lit a couple of gas lanterns in that corner of the rest stop, but it's still dim and shadowy in here.
>
> Abruptly, bright light fills the lobby. One by one, the headlights of the cars outside are coming on. Over the moaning of the storm, you can hear a cacophony of horns and car alarms going off all at once. You can also hear glass breaking outside.
>
> What do you do?

The heroes don't have to do anything, of course. They can let the demon outside trash their cars, and no one will get hurt. But several heroes have weapons or special equipment sitting out in their cars, and they may want to retrieve this gear at some point. If the heroes choose to stay inside and do nothing, go on to Scene 4 after the winter-demon commits a few acts of miscellaneous vandalism to the heroes' cars.

Anyone who goes outside to confront the creature or to get some gear is in for a combat scene. The demon does its best to injure or kill someone. It attacks lone heroes who are far away from their companions before it goes after a group of heroes.

> The wind screams and rages all around you as you stumble out into the snow. It's surprisingly deep, almost to your knees, and you can't see anything clearly. Suddenly, the car horns and alarms fall silent.

Randomly select one of the heroes who is outside for the winter-demon to attack and have that hero's player roll an Awareness skill check. (Doug Nichols's player can make an Awareness–*intuition* skill check instead.) If the check fails, the winter-demon gets a free attack on the hero. Read the following text:

From out of the storm's fury, something slams into you like a locomotive, slashing and gouging you with icy claws. From out of the storm's fury, something slams into you like a locomotive, slashing and gouging you with icy claws.

Roll the winter-demon's attack and damage normally.

If the skill check succeeds, the hero senses the winter-demon's presence just before it attacks. Read the following text:

Despite the poor visibility and biting cold, you sense an even greater cold approaching you. And then you see two points of fiery red, like sinister eyes burning into your soul. . . .

After the winter-demon gets its free attack, or after the hero spots the demon just before it attacks, ask all the players whose heroes are outside to make action checks. This means that each player should roll a 20-sided die and compare it to his character's action check score to generate a Marginal, Ordinary, Good, or Amazing result. Roll an action check for the winter-demon, but apply a –1 step bonus to the demon's action check since it's in its own element. Any heroes who are still inside the building must wait until the next action round before they can roll action checks and take any actions in the fight.

Now, count down through each phase of the round. Start with the Amazing phase and ask if any players achieved an Amazing action check. Then proceed to the Good, the Ordinary, and the Marginal phases.

When a player's turn comes up, ask her what her hero does. If the player wants to attack, ask her to make a skill check using the appropriate skill. Add a +2 step penalty to the heroes' attack rolls while they're outside, since driving snow limits visibility.

The winter-demon attacks a hero when its turn comes up.

After you've called for heroes to act in the Marginal (last) phase of the first round, the first round of combat ends. Ask each player to make an action check for the next round and repeat the process. The demon attacks a different hero each round.

Ending the Fight

Repeat the same process of action checks and Amazing, Good, Ordinary, and Marginal actions each round until the fight is over. The fight ends when all heroes retreat back into the building, after the demon injures three heroes, when the demon suffers more than six points of wound damage, or after five action rounds. Read the text below when the fight ends:

Suddenly, the white wolf-thing seems to fly apart in a spray of icy shards. A whirlwind of snow and howling wind dances and spins where the creature was standing. Dozens of shrieking voices seem to gibber and moan in the wind, and the creature laughs maniacally. Then it's gone, flying off into the blizzard. But you can still feel it out there, watching you.

It's very likely that several heroes are be wounded without hurting the demon at all. That's okay—this is a horror game, and you want the players to be scared for their heroes.

Assuming that the heroes retreat or drive off the demon and then go back inside, give the players a few minutes to talk things over, and then go on to Scene 4.

Scene 4: Smoke em' Out

While the heroes are occupied with the demon outside, Jacob Dumont decides to drive everyone out of the building and into the storm. He figures that the best way to do this is to start a fire. The demon can pick off individuals one at a time under the cover of darkness, and Dumont can search the rest stop for Riley's valise without interference, at least until he's forced to leave, too. (Dumont is more about action than good plans.)

During the heroes' investigation of the murder scene and fight with the demon, Dumont douses the newspaper stand in the store with gas from the gas pump and lights it. When the heroes are recovering from their encounter with the winter-demon, read or paraphrase the following text:

You're keeping an eye open for more strange happenings when you become aware of a strange orange glow illuminating the dark lobby. At the same time, you smell smoke! Behind you, the magazine stand in one corner of the convenience store is blazing away, and the flames are spreading fast!

What do you do?

This is a challenge scene—the heroes must extinguish the flames within six rounds, or the store becomes a blazing inferno that simply can't be extinguished with the materials at hand. Six rounds after the store goes up, heat and smoke make the lobby and the donut shop untenable. Six rounds after that, the entire building must be abandoned.

Each hero can act once per round, but they have no real opposition to act against—you can skip action checks. Just keep track of how many times each hero has acted.

To extinguish the flames before they spread, the heroes must amass 10 successes with various firefighting techniques, some of which are listed below:

Beat Out the Flames: Heroes can use coats, blankets, or stomping to fight the flames. Each round a hero tries to beat out the flames, have the player make a Strength feat check for his hero. An Ordinary success counts as 1 success toward putting out the fire, a Good counts as 2, and an Amazing counts as 3 successes. If the hero rolls a natural 20 on the control die, he catches fire and sustains 1d4 points of wound damage! He needs to roll on the ground the next round to put out the flames.

Each round that a hero stays up close to the flames, he suffers 1d4 points of stun damage (no armor prevents this). If a hero passes out in here, someone else must use an action to pull him out, or the fire kills him.

Get a Fire Extinguisher: It takes one action to locate a fire extinguisher, and another action to get the extinguisher back to the scene of the fire and get it ready for use. In the third round, the hero may start fighting the fire. Each action with a fire extinguisher requires a Dexterity feat check with a –3 step bonus (d20–d8). On a Failure, the hero scores 1 success toward extinguishing the fire; on an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing result, she scores 2, 3, or 4 successes.

Fire extinguishers are located in the restaurant kitchen, the storeroom of the donut shop, the convenience store (inaccessible due to the fire), and the hallway outside the rest rooms.

Use Water or Snow: To use water or snow effectively, the hero must spend one action to locate a bucket or container. A second action fills the bucket and another action gets him to the scene. After that, it takes one action to load up and one action to get the water or snow on the fire. Have the hero make a Strength feat check with a –1 step bonus. He scores 1, 2, or 3 successes toward extinguishing the fire with an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing result.

Move Flammables Away: Each time a hero spends an action to clear possible fuel for the fire away from the area, she buys one more round before the flames spread. For example, if a hero spends two actions moving flammable objects away from the magazine stand, the fire won't spread until eight rounds have passed instead of six. No skill check is necessary. At best, this tactic can buy six additional rounds before the fire spreads.

Scene 5: Firebug

The heroes should be able to put out the fire. If you have only one or two players in your game, you can make it easier by ruling that it takes 5 successes to put out the fire. Wait until the heroes have finished putting out the fire, then read the text:

> Well, you're not cold any longer. Sweat runs down your face and stings your eyes, and you're pretty sure you've got some minor burns on your hands and face. But it looks like you've got the fire under control. It's already dying out. Over the smell of smoke, you can make out a different odor—the sharp tang of gasoline in the air. That fire wasn't an accident.
>
> Suddenly, you hear a couple of loud bangs from the other room. A woman screams: "Look out! He's got a gun!"
>
> What do you do?

Since the heroes extinguished his fire, Dumont is trying something more direct. Any hero in the donut shop sees Dumont draw a gun and move out toward the lobby, firing a couple of shots in the air to drive everybody else to the ground. If Officer McDermott is in the donut shop at the start of the scene, the fight begins right away as Dumont yanks out a gun and starts shooting at her. (Ignore the boxed text below if this is the case.) Otherwise, he steps into the lobby to confront the heroes.

> You can hear people screaming and diving for cover in the other room. Suddenly, the big trucker in the black baseball cap appears in the doorway of the donut shop, pointing a pistol in your direction. "I won't let you meddle with my plans any longer," he hisses. He raises the pistol. "Time to die!"
>
> What do you do?

Have the players make action checks for their heroes—this is definitely a combat scene. Make an action check for Dumont, too. When his turn comes up, the cultist shoots at any armed character he can see. If no one is carrying weapons, he shoots at Officer McDermott. If Dumont doesn't see any armed characters out here, he shoots at whichever character is standing nearby.

Dumont doesn't expect anyone behind him to do anything, so if a hero is in the donut shop, he can attack Dumont from behind with a –2 step bonus to his attack roll.

Jacob Dumont, Cult Member

Combat Specialist

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	12	6	+1 step
Dexterity	11	5	+1 step
Constitution	10	5	
Intelligence	9	4	
Will	12	6	+1 step
Personality	6	3	

Action Check Score: 14+/13/6/3

1–3	Amazing	7–13	Ordinary
4–6	Good	14+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 12 ○○○○○○○○○○○○
Wound 12 ○○○○○○○○○○○○
Mortal 6 ○○○○○○

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Unarmed	14/7/3	Personal	d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s	LI
Pistol*	13/6/3	6/12/50	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4m	HI

*+1 step penalty for medium range, +2 steps for long

Armor

Kevlar vest d6–3 (LI) d6–2 (HI) d4–2 (En)

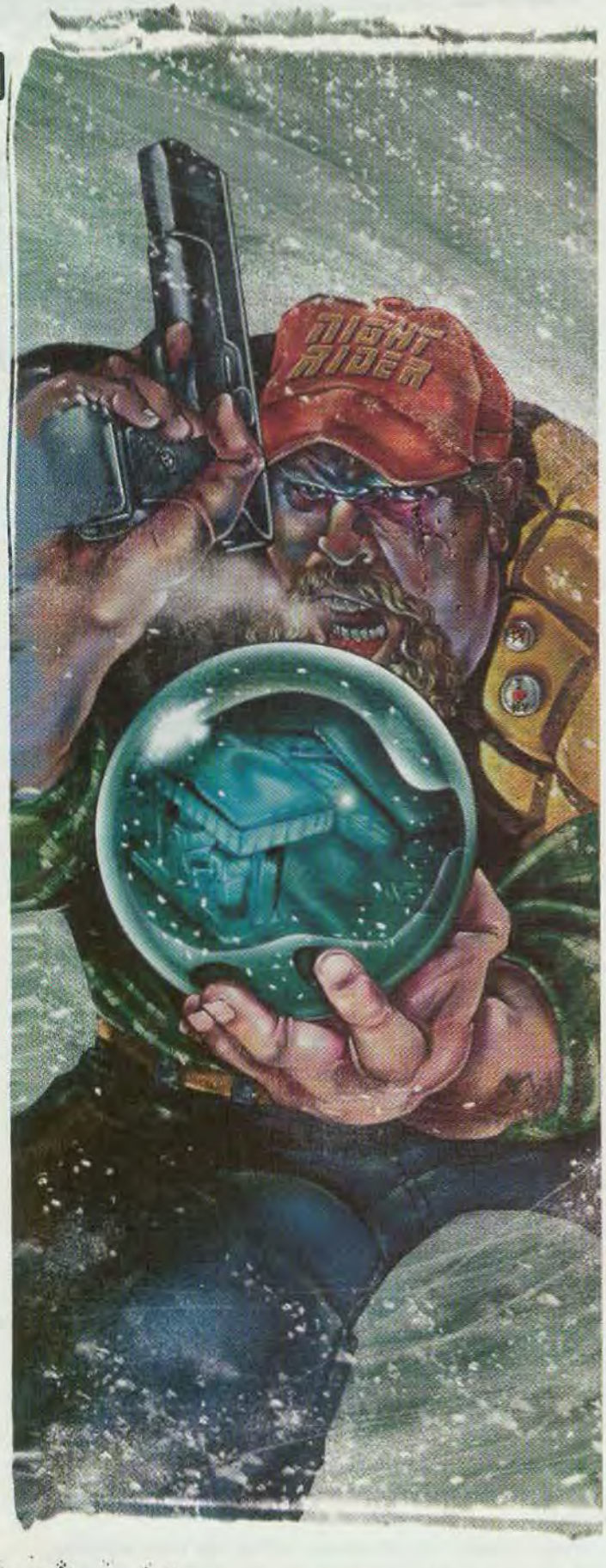
Skills

Athletics [12]; Unarmed Attack [12]–*brawl* [14]; Ranged Weapons [11]–*pistol [13]*; Vehicle Operation [11]; Stamina [10]–*endurance [11]*; Knowledge [9]–*language (French) [12]*, *language (English) [11]*; Awareness [12]–*intuition [13]*; Lore [12]–*occult lore [13]*; Resolve [12]; Interaction [6].

Background/Personality

Dumont is a member of *Les Trieze Corbins*, the acolytes of the modern-day sorcerer Michel Galvin. He and his companions have waited for years since Galvin's disappearance to get their hands on his arcane lore. In the current situation, Dumont thinks nothing of killing everyone in the rest stop to accomplish his goals and glorify the dark powers he worships.

Dumont is a large, powerfully built man who dresses like a trucker or longshoreman. He speaks with a guttural French-Canadian accent, when he speaks at all—he's normally surly and unresponsive to any kind of attempts at conversation.



Most of the heroes are probably armed by this point, so they should kill or incapacitate Dumont quickly. Remember to apply the heroes' Dexterity resistance modifiers to Dumont's attack rolls when he shoots at them. If the fight goes poorly for Dumont (if less than half his wound boxes are left, or he's suffered mortal damage), he surrenders; go to Scene 6.

Taking Down Dumont

Your players might have their heroes tackle or grab Dumont to wrestle him to the ground and get the gun away from him.

If a hero tries to do something like this, have the player make an Unarmed Attack–*brawl*, Unarmed Attack–*power martial arts*, or Acrobatics–*defensive martial arts* skill check. Instead of inflicting damage, the hero puts a hold of Ordinary, Good, or Amazing quality on Dumont. If the heroes use a second action to wrestle with Dumont while he's held, the hold turns into a pin—they get him on the ground and get him under control.

Dumont can continue to shoot or act while held, but he suffers a +1, +2, or +3 step penalty depending on whether he's in an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing hold. He can't do anything while pinned, as long as the heroes keep him under control.

Dumont may use an action to try to break out of a hold, but not a pin. To break out, he must make a Strength feat check (add the Strength resistance modifier of the holding hero) and match or beat the success of the hold. For example, if Dumont were held with a Good hold, he would need a Good or Amazing success on his Strength feat check to break free. Of course, even if he does, he can be tackled again.

If the heroes defeat Dumont without killing him, go to Scene 6. If he gets away or the heroes kill him, go to Scene 7.

Scene 6: *Les Trieze Corbins*

You need to run this scene only if the heroes capture Dumont without incapacitating him. They can't talk to him if he runs off, is dead, or is unconscious. If the cultist can't be questioned, skip ahead to Scene 7.

The trucker is a big man, with a thin beard and a feverish intensity in his eyes. He's dressed in a weathered old parka and wears a black ball cap on his head. Strands of unkempt hair cover his shoulders. He looks up at you with contempt. "You think I am beaten so easily, eh?" he snarls. He's got a strange accent, maybe French-Canadian, in his voice. "I think no. My friend out in the storm will dispose of you one by one. When morning comes, I'll be here, and you'll all be frozen corpses!"

This is an encounter scene. The heroes have a chance to interrogate Dumont and find out what he's up to, what's waiting outside, and how they can defeat it. It's also another way for you to let the players in on the story's background so that they'll understand why their heroes became involved.

Questions and Answers

Ask the players if their heroes are replying to Dumont's threat or asking him questions. Determine what topic they're asking

about and use the guidelines to determine what they can get out of the cultist. Remember, Dumont is contemptuous and angry. He'll spit out anything he says, adding various insults as you see fit.

Who Are You? "I am Jacob Dumont."

If the players ask what he does or where he comes from, Dumont tells them that he is a powerful sorcerer. He threatens them with horrible dooms. "You have meddled with *Les Trieze Corbins*. We shall remember that—always."

What's Going on Here? "Nothing that you should have interfered with, fool."

If the players press harder, call for an Interaction–*interview*, Interaction–*intimidate*, or Investigate skill check. (If the speaking hero doesn't have any of these skills, an Interaction check is fine.) Each successful skill check reveals one piece of information:

- Dumont's here to retrieve some artifact.
- The artifact was in the possession of a man named Jonas Riley—the fellow who was injured in the demon's attack.
- The demon is helping Dumont.

What Are You Looking For? "If I tell you, you will keep it from me. I am not stupid."

If the players press, he adds, "It is something sacred—a work of my master's hand. I will not have you defile it with your touch."

What Is the Thing Outside? "A demon of winter—a great and terrible demon. I command it. Soon it will destroy all of you!"

How Do We Beat the Demon? "Hah! Your weapons are almost useless. Better to consider how you want to meet your end."

If the players continue, have them make skill checks as described above. Each successful skill check reveals a piece of the following information:

- The demon won't give up until it accomplishes its mission.
- Magical spells may dismiss the creature. (Unfortunately, neither Dumont nor the heroes know any magical spells.)
- Mundane weapons won't hurt it much, but fire or silver might harm it.

What If We Just Kill (or Hurt) You Now? "I have no fear of death or torture. There are more of us. One sacrifice for the cause is nothing."

Getting Ready?

While the heroes were interrogating or holding Dumont, they might have had some time to make some preparations for another confrontation with the demon. Ask the players whether they want their heroes to do anything while they're questioning Dumont.

Get Weapons: McDermott and Wheeler have some heavy weapons in their cars. Retrieving them takes the heroes only a minute, but make sure you scare the players by allowing them to think the demon may attack at any moment!

Get Fire: Preparing torches or Molotov cocktails (gasoline-filled bottles with rags stuffed into the neck for easy lighting and throwing) is a good idea. It takes only a few minutes for a hero to pump gas from the filling station, but he or she has to go outside first. Again, scare the players to build suspense.

Get Silver: Several characters may have silver jewelry, and the convenience store includes a few pieces of locally made sterling silver earrings. It takes only a few minutes to empty the buckshot from a shotgun shell and stuff it full of silver. Assume that the heroes can put together six shots' worth of silver.

Interview's Over

Allow the players to question Dumont until they've followed up two or three lines of inquiry. Then read the text below and go to Scene 7.

> Dumont suddenly throws back his head and laughs. "I tire of this game," he says. "Come to me, my pet!" He gives out a horrifying shriek, spitting out words in a language you don't know.

Scene 7: Fire and Ice

If the heroes kill or incapacitate Dumont, or when Dumont decides the interrogation is over, the ice-demon breaks into the building to finish off the surviving heroes. This time the demon tries to kill everyone it can catch.

> Outside, the wind howls. You hear glass breaking and the sound of a door flying open. A gust of icy wind sweeps through the building, as the storm suddenly reaches out for you!
>
> The other people in the rest stop—the employees and your fellow travelers—scatter and run, seeking shelter. In the confusion, a sharp blast of wind knocks over the gas lanterns, which gutter out, leaving you in darkness!

The demon attacks any hero it can catch. Remember that the creature is indoors now, so it loses its action check bonus and superior resistance modifiers.

If you want to make this fight more dramatic, the demon slashes once at a hero and then chases one of the supporting cast members. Mabel runs into the storeroom; Anne and Danny flee into the restaurant; Ahmed runs for the nearest door; and Norma just goes to ground under a table in the donut shop.

Fight Ice with Fire . . .

The players may realize by now that guns don't work extremely well against the ice-demon. There are several ways to attack the demon with fire, though. Dr. Neary has several road flares in her car, and the gas station is nearby. There are three ways to use these weapons against the creature.

Warding: Any open flame or a burning flare deters the demon from attacking a hero who specifically tries to keep the flame between the creature and herself. The demon must make a successful Will feat at a +2 step penalty to ignore a flare or torch and attack the hero carrying the flame.

Douse and Light: There's plenty of gasoline around. A hero could fill a bucket with gasoline and carry a lighter, torch, or flare to light the gasoline fast. Dousing the demon requires the

hero to get close to the demon (3 meters or less) and make a successful Dexterity feat check with a –1 step bonus. Lighting the gasoline takes another action. If the demon is set aflame, it suffers d6, 2d6, or 3d6 points of wound damage on an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success with the dousing attempt.

Molotov Cocktail: Attacking with a Molotov cocktail requires an Athletics–*throw* skill check (or just Athletics, if the hero has no *throw* skill). The cocktail ignites immediately, without needing an action to torch it off. It inflicts d4, d6, or 2d6 points of wound damage on an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success with the attack roll.

Aerosol Sprays: Using fire to light the liquid from a can of hair spray, for example, can inflict d4+1 points of stun damage, d4 points of wound damage, or d4+2 points of wound damage for an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success.

. . . or Gunfire

Wheeler's assault rifle and Officer McDermott's shotgun aren't much more effective than pistols, since the damage still downgrades before it affects the demon.

Silver Bullets: If the heroes loaded any shotgun shells with silver, they'll do much better. The demon is affected normally by silver weapons (no downgrading effect to damage), and it receives no armor protection against silver projectiles. Since the shotgun inflicts double damage at short range, one or two hits with silver-filled shells should take care of the demon.

Occult Knowledge

Dr. Akens knows enough about the occult to suspect that Dumont doesn't have the skill to control the winter-demon without help. During the battle, have the player running Dr. Akens roll a Lore–*occult lore* skill check. If successful, he realizes that the snow globe may be some sort of talisman that keeps the demon in check. (If Dr. Akens has read through Riley's notes, give the player a –2 step bonus to the skill check.) This successful skill check also allows Akens to theorize that the snow globe may have the same vulnerability that the demon does—fire.

Victory?

If the heroes defeat the demon or destroy the snow globe, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> The howling of the wind and the screaming of the winter-demon rise to an intolerable pitch. Stinging ice scours your flesh, and waves of bitter cold rake your body. Then the creature seems to explode into a spray of ice, dissipating in the wind. Its chattering howls die with it, slowly fading away. The wind relents, and the malign sentience of the storm outside seems to vanish as well.
>
> It's done.

Or Defeat?

If the demon is simply too much for the heroes, you can spare their lives—just make sure that the demon can reach the snow globe. If a hero is carrying the artifact, the demon batters that hero into unconsciousness and then steals the globe; if the globe is simply lying about somewhere, the demon ignores the heroes, seizes the globe, and leaves. If he can, Dumont makes his escape.

If some of the heroes are in bad shape, the supporting characters who work in the rest stop can attempt to save their lives with some quick first aid. Use your discretion, but don't be too harsh.

Conclusion

If Jonas Riley survives, he comes to sometime around sunrise. Although he's weak and exhausted, he carefully questions the heroes about the events of the preceding night. Then he offers the heroes his business card, marked with the Hoffmann Institute logo. "You handled yourselves pretty well," Riley tells them. "We're looking for people like you." This is a great way to set the stage for future adventures.

Destroying the snow globe requires that it be engulfed in fire or great heat for 1 round, then struck with a hard object. During the time the globe is heated, the winter-demon is completely vulnerable to *any* attack. If the globe is struck after the round of heat, it instantly shatters, at which point the demon is no longer tied to this dimension (since it can no longer achieve its designated goal). Should this occur, the demon must make a Will feat check at the beginning of each round. If it succeeds, it remains in the fight. If it fails, go to "Victory?" below.

If Riley didn't survive, another Hoffmann Institute agent named Mary Carter shows up at the rest stop at daybreak, following the snowplows. She pieces together the heroes' story and offers the same deal.

If Dumont made his escape, don't worry. The bad guys might have won the day, but some or all of the heroes probably survived. They know the story of *Les Trieze Corbins* now, and they've got a reason to go after Dumont. You can use this as a springboard for another adventure—perhaps one of your own creation.

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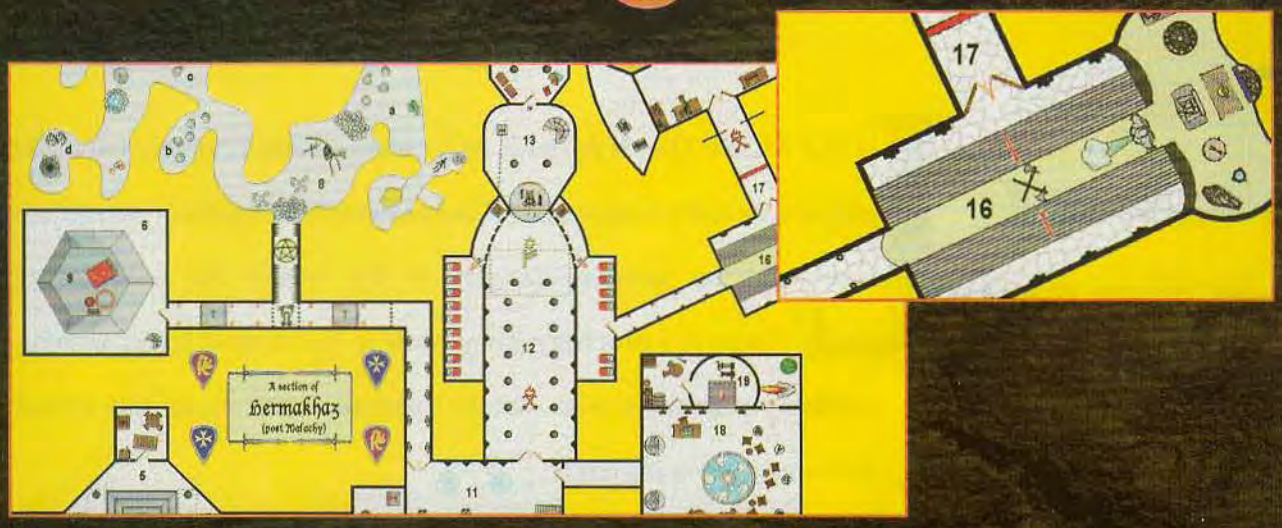

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FROM THE PAGES OF *BEYOND THE HIGH ROAD*

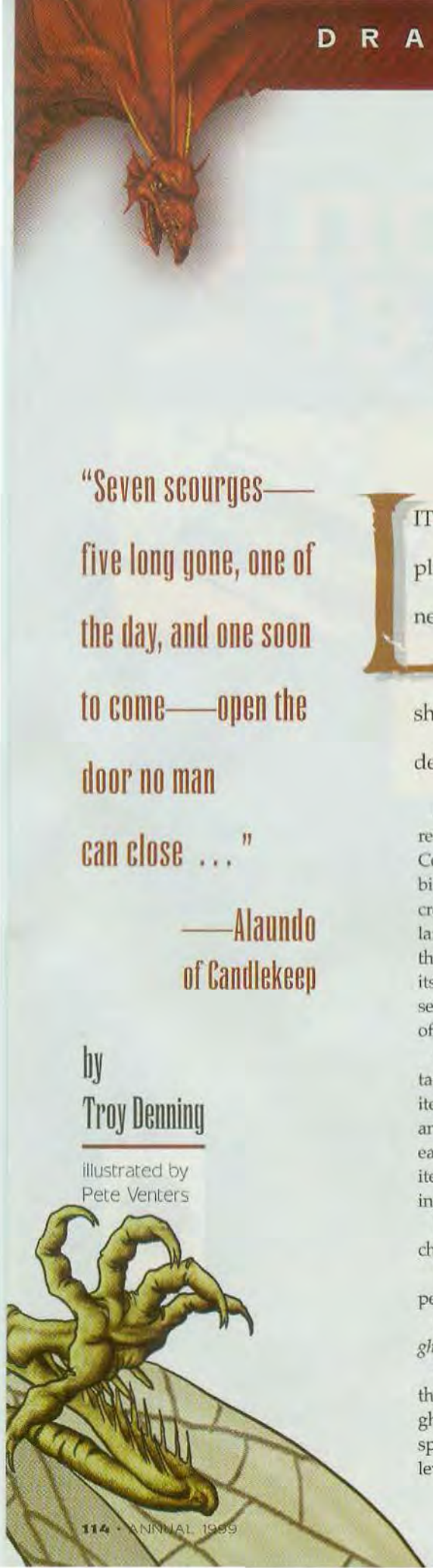
The Ghazneths

"Seven scourges—five long gone, one of the day, and one soon to come—open the door no man can close . . ."

—Alaundo of Candlekeep

by Troy Denning

illustrated by Pete Venters



LITTLE MORE THAN A YEAR AGO, King Azoun IV nearly fell to the plot of a would-be usurper, and out of those troubles have risen seven new—and far greater—dangers to the realm: the scourges of Alaundo's prophecy. They come in the form of the ghazneths, shadowy phantoms who sustain themselves on magic and spread devastation over the land.

Once important personages in the realm, the ghazneths have all betrayed Cormyr and suffered terribly for it. Their bitterness has twisted them into dark creatures bent on the destruction of the land they once served. Five harken from the past—one is older than the kingdom itself—and one is from the present. The seventh will rise soon to herald the doom of a realm.

All ghazneths absorb magic they contact. To do so, they must touch a magical item or be the target of an item or spell and remain in contact for one round for each level of the spell or item. Magical items are considered to have the following levels:

Charged magical items: 5 levels per charge remaining;

"Permanent" magical items: 100 levels per ability possessed;

Use of any magical item's ability against a ghazneth: 5 levels per use.

Spells that expire in fewer rounds than their level are absorbed instantly, but the ghazneth remains stunned 1 round per spell level. A ghazneth can store one level of magic for each year of age.

After absorbing a level of magic ghazneth can expend it as noted in its individual description. Ghazneths temporarily depleted of magic cannot use their special powers, but they can still fly, fight, and move normally.

Death means nothing to ghazneths. They simply exist, and whether they are alive or dead does not affect their abilities, statistics, or personalities. Five are dead already (and can be turned as undead, but not destroyed). If raised, they simply become living ghazneths. Similarly, if a living ghazneth is killed, it simply becomes undead.

A ghazneth reduced to 0 hit points automatically regenerates as many hit points as possible and flees. If it has no magic levels available, it lies dormant for 13 hours, absorbing one level of magic directly from Toril's Magic Weave. The ghazneth can do this even if its "dead" body has been destroyed, *disintegrated,* and/or otherwise dispersed.

Troy Denning introduces the Ghazneths in his new novel, Beyond the High Road, *in bookstores in December.*

Suzara the Scold

CLIMATE/TERRAIN	Cormyr and surrounding lands
FREQUENCY	Unique
ORGANIZATION	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLE	Any
DIET	Special (see below)
INTELLIGENCE	High (14)
TREASURE	U
ALIGNMENT	Neutral evil
NO. APPEARING	1
ARMOR CLASS	–6
MOVEMENT	24, fly 36 (C)
HIT DICE	14 (110 hp)
THAC0	7 (4 in melee)
NO. OF ATTACKS	3 or 1 weapon
DAMAGE/ATTACK	1d4+7/1d4+7/1d6+7, or by weapon +7 (Strength bonus)
SPECIAL ATTACKS	Blight (see below), –7 initiative bonus
SPECIAL DEFENSES	Hit only by iron weapons, regeneration
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Special, see below
SIZE	M (6' tall)
MORALE	Elite (14)
XP VALUE	21,000

From a distance, Suzara the Scold resembles a beggar in a ragged cape and huge tattered hood. Suzara is the Scourge of Blight, and her true appearance reflects her status as the most dangerous of all ghazneths. She is tall and skeletal, with a pair of leathery black wings and a mane of coarse hair often mistaken for the aforementioned cape and hood. Her red eyes cannot be said to glow, but they are always visible, giving her an otherworldly look.

Suzara the Scold was once Suzara Obarskyr, wife to Ondeth Obarskyr (founder of Cormyr). Never fond of life in the wilderness, Suzara became a ghazneth more than 1,300 years ago after abandoning her husband and eldest son in the city named for her (Suzail) to return to a less toilsome life in Impiltur.

Combat: Not one to seek out combat, Suzara is nevertheless quite capable of defending herself. Because of her incredible speed, she receives a –7 initiative bonus during any round she is not surprised, while her supernatural Strength (19) provides a +7 damage bonus to her attacks. When pressed, she prefers to slash opponents with her talonlike nails and bite with her teeth for 1d4/1d4/1d6 points of damage plus Strength bonus.

Suzara suffers damage only from weapons made of cold-forged iron, regenerates up to 11 hp per round, and absorbs any magic used against her. (See the introduction for details.)

During any round in which she has the initiative, Suzara can forgo her attacks and allow her opponent the first action. If the opponent casts a spell at her, she may take refuge behind a wing and negate the effects of the spell while still absorbing its levels. She suffers the full effects of any spell striking her body, but only for as long as it takes to absorb the spell levels.

Suzara's primary weapon is her power to blight. See the Ecology section for details on how she uses this power.

Habitat/Society: Suzara has spent the last 1,300 years alone in a cramped tomb, feeding on the bitterness she bore Ondeth for dragging her away from her comfortable life in Impiltur. Recently freed, she is actively working to destroy her husband's legacy. She especially enjoys taking long walks through Cormyr's more remote regions, spreading blight and disease through the croplands. On the rare occasions when she feels the need of company, she joins her fellow ghazneths in a small keep they have constructed on the edge of the Farsea Marsh.

Ecology: Like all ghazneths, Suzara feeds on magic. When she is not spreading her blight or aiding her fellow ghazneths in terrorizing Cormyr, she hunts magic. At approximately 1,360 years of age, she can hold up to 1,360 levels.

For each level she expends, she can:

1. *Detect magic* up to 136 miles away for one day; or

2. For one turn, automatically cause all crop plants within 136 yards of her to contract a fungal disease and die within 1d10 days; or

3. Regenerate 11 hit points; or

4. Cause any one inanimate item of no more than 1,100 pounds to rot, crumble, or rust away within 1d10 rounds.

5. Cause any one living being she touches to make a successful saving throw vs. death magic or age 10 years.

Note that the first two powers are automatic; as long as Suzara has any magic levels available, she must expend them to keep these powers active.

Boldovar the Mad

CLIMATE/TERRAIN	Cormyr and surrounding lands
FREQUENCY	Unique
ORGANIZATION	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLE	Any
DIET	Special (see below)
INTELLIGENCE	Exceptional (16)
TREASURE	R
ALIGNMENT	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING	1
ARMOR CLASS	–5
MOVEMENT	24, fly 36 (C)
HIT DICE	13 (100 hp)
THAC0	7 (4 in melee)
NO. OF ATTACKS	3 or 1 weapon
DAMAGE/ATTACK	1d4+6/1d4+6/1d6+6, or by weapon +6 (Strength bonus)
SPECIAL ATTACKS	Illusion (see below), –6 initiative bonus
SPECIAL DEFENSES	Hit only by iron weapons, regeneration
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Special (see below)
SIZE	M (5' tall)
MORALE	Elite (14)
XP VALUE	20,000

A squat man-thing with enormous crimson eyes and filthy black skin, Boldovar the Mad is the Scourge of Darkness. He has a pair of leathery wings and a wild halo of spiky hair. His nose is huge and veined from too much drink, and the gaping hollow in his unkempt beard can be identified as a mouth only by its four yellow fangs and red wagging tongue. Boldovar delights in running around nude, shaking his pot belly at attractive women and displaying his unspeakable collection of parasites to impressionable young children.

Boldovar the Dark was once King Boldovar, a raving lunatic who exulted in hurling his paramours off the castle walls. He became a ghazneth 1,120 years ago after becoming entangled with a victim and being dragged off the roof of Faerlthann's Keep. It is a well-kept secret that he survived the fall; his royal magician quickly spirited the mad king away and placed a worthier monarch on the throne. How Boldovar escaped his isolated mountain prison is a mystery even to him.

Combat: Boldovar revels in combat, attacking either with the most exotic weapon available or his own teeth and talons. He gives no consideration to efficiency and often seems to prefer the slower method. Because of his incredible speed and agility, Boldovar receives a –6 initiative bonus during any round he is not surprised, while his impressive Strength (18/00) provides a +6 damage bonus to his attacks. Boldovar suffers damage only from weapons made of cold-forged iron, regenerates up to 10 hp per round, and absorbs any magic used against him. (See the introduction for details.)

During any round in which he has the initiative, Boldovar can forgo his attacks and allow his opponent the first action. If the opponent casts a spell at him, he can take refuge behind a wing and negate the effects of the spell while still absorbing its levels. He suffers the normal effects of any spell striking his body, but only for as long as it takes to absorb the spell levels.

Boldovar's most effective weapon is his ghazneth power, delusion. See the Ecology section for details on this power.

Habitat/Society: After spending the last 1,100 years in his tomb, Boldovar is ready for some fun. Although he will (somewhat reluctantly) cooperate with his fellow ghazneths, he prefers to spend his time spreading terror and mental illness through the cities of Cormyr.

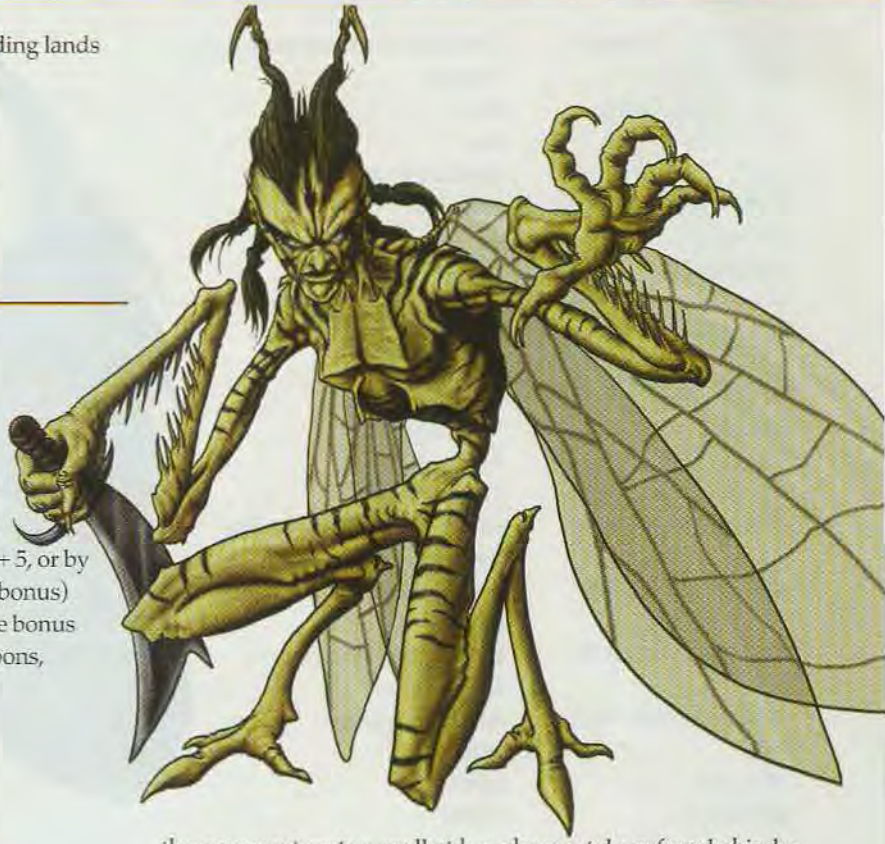
Ecology: Boldovar craves magic as gluttons crave food. When not terrorizing hapless victims or turning housewives against their husbands, he is out hunting magic. At approximately 1,120 years of age, he can store up to 1,120 levels.

For each level he expends, he can:

1. *Detect magic* up to 112 miles away for one day; or
2. For 1 turn, cause every intelligent being within 112 yards to misinterpret events in the worst possible light; or
3. Regenerate 10 hit points; or
4. Create a circle of *darkness* 112 feet in diameter; or
5. Cast one level worth of spells, selecting from any spell in the Illusion/Phantasm school of magic (for example, a 3rd-level spell requires an expenditure of three spell levels) as an 11th-level illusionist; or
6. Delusion: Force any intelligent being he touches to make a Wisdom check. Failure indicates the being has gone insane; he or she suffers a 6-point Wisdom loss and must make a successful ability check any time he or she attempts a major action.

Merendil the Bloody

CLIMATE/TERRAIN	Cormyr and surrounding lands
FREQUENCY	Unique
ORGANIZATION	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLE	Any
DIET	Special (see below)
INTELLIGENCE	High (14)
TREASURE	L×10, U
ALIGNMENT	Lawful evil
NO. APPEARING	1
ARMOR CLASS	–4
MOVEMENT	21, fly 33 (B)
HIT DICE	12 (90 hp)
THAC0	9 (7 in melee)
NO. OF ATTACKS	3 (claw/claw/bite or weapon/claw/bite)
DAMAGE/ATTACK	1d4+5/1d4+5/1d6+5, or by weapon +5 (Strength bonus)
SPECIAL ATTACKS	Bloodlust, –5 initiative bonus
SPECIAL DEFENSES	Hit only by iron weapons, regeneration
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Special (see below)
SIZE	M (5' tall)
MORALE	Fanatic (17)
XP VALUE	19,000



Merendil the Bloody is the Scourge of War. Her appearance seems a grotesque fusion of woman and insect, with a powerful torso, tiny waist, and a pair of huge wasplike wings. She has smoky black hair, blazing white eyes, and stick-thin limbs that fold like those of a praying mantis. When viewed closely, Merendil's face can assume the visage of a handsome noblewoman about 60 years old.

Merendil the Bloody used to be Lady Ryndala Merendil, the matriarch of a powerful, early Cormyrean noble family. She became a ghazneth approximately 994 years ago, shortly after fleeing Cormyr because a of failed assassination she had organized against Prince Azoun I.

Combat: As the Scourge of War, Merendil is always ready for a fight—and the bloodier, the better. She seeks to kill in the most lethal manner possible, often combining a weapon with hand-to-hand combat. One of her favorite tactics is to impale a victim on the talons of one hand, strike with a short sword or scimitar carried in the other, then tear into the victim's neck with her powerful yellow fangs. She is so practiced at this method that if she takes a victim by surprise, he or she automatically suffers full damage from all three attacks (no attack roll required).

Merendil receives a –5 initiative bonus during any round she is not surprised, and her extraordinary Strength (18/95) gives her a +5 damage bonus. Merendil suffers damage only from weapons made of cold-forged iron, regenerates up to 9 hit points a round, and absorbs any magic used against her. (See the introduction for details.)

During any round in which she has the initiative, Merendil can forgo her attacks and allow her opponent the first action. If the opponent casts a spell at her, she can take refuge behind a wing and negate the effects of the spell, while still absorbing its levels. She suffers the full effects of any spell striking her body only for as long as it takes to absorb the spell levels. Merendil always uses this ability when facing a spellcaster.

Merendil's favorite weapon is her power of bloodlust. See the Ecology section for more information on this power.

Habitat/Society: Merendil has spent 994 years in her tomb, plotting vengeance on the Obarskyr line and laying plans to succeed where she failed in the year 376 DR. She considers it a sign from the gods of wickedness that the current king bears the same name as the young prince she failed to assassinate. Of all the ghazneths, she is the most resolute and rational, and she often serves as a sort of leader among equals.

Ecology: Merendil spends at least a quarter of every day hunting fresh sources of magic. At 994 years of age, she can store up to 994 levels.

For each level she expends, she can:

1. *Detect magic* up to 99 miles away for one day; or
2. For one turn, automatically cause all intelligent beings within 99 yards of her to make a successful Wisdom check or attack any adversary in sight; or
3. Regenerate 9 hit points; or
4. Incite one intelligent being to murder a specified person (once each day, the victim of this power can make a successful Intelligence check to resist this urge for 24 hours); or
5. Incite all intelligent beings within 99 feet to make a successful Wisdom check or begin rioting and looting the nearest settlement.

Melineth the Grasping

CLIMATE/TERRAIN	Cormyr and surrounding lands
FREQUENCY	Unique
ORGANIZATION	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLE	Any
DIET	Special (see below)
INTELLIGENCE	High (14)
TREASURE	Z
ALIGNMENT	Neutral evil
NO. APPEARING	1
ARMOR CLASS	–3
MOVEMENT	21, fly 33 (C)
HIT DICE	11 (80 hp)
THAC0	9 (7 in melee)
NO. OF ATTACKS	3 or 1 weapon
DAMAGE/ATTACK	1d4+4/1d4+4/1d6+4, or by weapon +4 (Strength bonus)
SPECIAL ATTACKS	Disease (see below), –4 initiative bonus
SPECIAL DEFENSES	Hit only by iron weapons, regeneration
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Special (see below)
SIZE	M (6' tall)
MORALE	Elite (14)
XP VALUE	18,000

Melineth the Grasping is powerful-looking figure with a broad chest, hulking shoulders, and long gangling arms. His face is blocky and ruggedly handsome despite a flat orcish nose, thick jutting brow, and three dark goat horns curling up from his hairline. He has a robust build and clear skin. Only his scabrous wings and rancid black breath hint at his true nature as the Scourge of Pestilence.

Melineth the Grasping was once Melineth Turcasson, father-in-law to King Duar. Melineth became a ghazneth sometime after 429 DR, when he took advantage of his son-in-law's trust to sell the entire city of Suzail for 500 sacks of gold.

Combat: Melineth is more than willing to fight—provided he stands to gain something. He usually tries to secure an advantage over his foes, attacking from the air or using his power to disorient and weaken them.

Melineth receives a –4 initiative bonus during any round he is not surprised, while his substantial Strength (18/80) gives him a +4 damage bonus. Melineth suffers damage only from weapons made of cold-forged iron, regenerates up to 8 points of damage per round, and absorbs any magic used against him. (See the introduction for details.)

During any round in which he has the initiative, Melineth can allow his opponent the first action. If the opponent casts a spell at him, he can take refuge behind a wing and negate the effects of the spell while still absorbing its levels. He suffers the full effects of any spell striking him in the body, though only for as long as it takes to absorb the spell levels.

Melineth's primary weapon is the power of Pestilence. See the Ecology section for details on this power.

Habitat/Society: Having spent the last 938 years alone in a small tomb crammed with 500 sacks of gold, Melineth is determined to avail himself of more comfortable surroundings. He is currently searching for an out-of-the-way keep where he can store his wealth and rest in comfort. A miser and loner, he does not enjoy the company of his fellow ghazneths and cooperates with them only because they'll steal his gold if he doesn't.

Ecology: Melineth covets magic almost as much as he covets gold and passes every day searching for both. At 938 years of age, he can store up to 938 levels.

For each level he expends, he can:

1. *Detect magic* up to 94 miles away for one day; or

2. For one turn, automatically cause any creature within 94 yards to make a Constitution check or fall ill (see combat above); or

3. Regenerate 8 points; or

4. Render any creature within 9 yards of himself instantly infirm; such beings fall into a feverish torpor, cannot perform even the simplest acts for themselves, and must be cared for by someone else. Victims must make a successful saving throw vs. death magic every 24 hours or die; or

5. Cause any body part he touches to wither; touched victims must make a successful saving throw vs. petrification, failure indicating the touched area withers and cannot be employed for any purpose. If a *cure disease* is not cast on the affected area within 24 hours, it becomes permanently useless (until restored by a *regenerate* spell). If the area touched is the chest, neck, or head, the victim dies within 1d6 rounds unless attended to by a cleric or another person with healing proficiencies.

Luthax the Fiery

CLIMATE/TERRAIN	Cormyr and surrounding lands
FREQUENCY	Unique
ORGANIZATION	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLE	Any
DIET	Special (see below)
INTELLIGENCE	Genius (18)
TREASURE	S, T, U, V
ALIGNMENT	Lawful evil
NO. APPEARING	1
ARMOR CLASS	–2
MOVEMENT	21 (5 if unable to spread wings), Fly 33 (C)
HIT DICE	10 (70 hp)
THAC0	11 (9 in melee)
NO. OF ATTACKS	3 or 1 weapon
DAMAGE/ATTACK	1d4+3/1d4+3/1d6+3, or by weapon +3
SPECIAL ATTACKS	Spells, heat (see below), –3 initiative bonus
SPECIAL DEFENSES	Hit only by iron weapons, regeneration
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Special (see below)
SIZE	M (6' tall)
MORALE	Steady (12)
XP VALUE	20,000

As the Scourge of Smoke, Luthax the Fiery resembles an ashen gargoyle. His skin is powdery gray and prone to billowing off in acrid puffs, while his wings are made of living smoke and constantly trail long wisps. He is large and broad-shouldered, with a sizable paunch and underdeveloped legs that can barely hold his weight. (Even when running, he uses his wings to support and propel himself; if this is impossible, his ground movement is reduced to 5.) Luthax has a craggy face with bushy brows, scintillating scarlet eyes, and an over large crimson nose. He wears his beard long and his scalp shaved.

The High Castellan of Cormyr's War Wizards during the reign of King Draxius, Luthax was forced to leave the kingdom when a young mage exposed his plot to replace the royal government with an oligarchy of magic. It is not known when he became a ghazneth, but records suggest he made the transformation before the great Battle of the Witch Lords (900 DR).

Combat: Luthax prefers to attack with spells and his ghazneth powers. He receives a –3 initiative bonus during any round he is not surprised, and his uncanny Strength (18/65) gives him a +3 damage bonus. He suffers damage only from weapons of cold-forged iron, regenerates up to 7 hp per round, and absorbs any magic used against him. (See the introduction for details.)

Luthax casts spells as an 18th-level wizard, provided he has at least 375 levels of magic stored. Casting spells does not expend stored magic, but if he has less than 375 levels, the spell is absorbed and fails. After centuries of study, Luthax can call upon nearly any wizard spell except: *limited wish, wish, astral spell, gate*, and spells that involve leaving the Prime Material plane. Luthax's spell progression is 5/5/5/5/5/3/3/2/1. Typically, he has the following spells available: *light, magic missile* (x3), *sleep; darkness 15' radius, deafness, invisibility, knock, locate object; blink, haste, hold person, invisibility 10' radius, wind wall; charm monster, confusion, dimension door, solid fog, vacancy; passwall, stone shape, telekinesis, teleport, transmute rock to mud; enchant an item, part water, transmute water to dust; mass invisibility, phase door, vanish; binding, sink; time stop.*

See Ecology for details on Luthax's power of fire.

Habitat/Society: Luthax resents Lady Merendil's leadership role and can prove reluctant to cooperate with her.

Ecology: Because Luthax requires magic to cast spells, he is vigilant about finding magic to absorb. At approximately 741 years of age, he can store 741 levels. He must maintain about half this amount, 375 levels, to cast his spells.

For each level Luthax expends, he can:

1. *Detect magic* up to 74 miles away for one day; or

2. For one turn, cause tiny fissures to open anywhere he steps that emit a steady flow of sulfurous gases that, over a period of 24 hours, kills all plantlife within 74 yards; or

3. Regenerate 7 hit points; or

4. Cause a 74 yard-long earthquake, toppling any tree or structure within 74 feet; or

5. Create a 70' flame barrier 7 yards long from any fissure within 70 feet that inflicts 7d8 points of fire damage to any creature touched. (A successful saving throw vs. spell reduces damage by half.) By expending more levels, he can increase the length, height, or damage of the barrier.

Xanthon the Baneful

CLIMATE/TERRAIN	Cormyr and surrounding lands
FREQUENCY	Unique
ORGANIZATION	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLE	Any
DIET	Special (see below)
INTELLIGENCE	High (14)
TREASURE	P
ALIGNMENT	Neutral evil

NO. APPEARING	1
ARMOR CLASS	–1
MOVEMENT	18
HIT DICE	9 (60 hp)
THAC0	11 (10 in melee)
NO. OF ATTACKS	3 or 1 weapon
DAMAGE/ATTACK	1d4+3/1d4+3/1d6+3, or by weapon +3 (Strength bonus)
SPECIAL ATTACKS	Swarms (see below), –2 initiative bonus
SPECIAL DEFENSES	Hit only by iron weapons, regeneration
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Special (see below)
SIZE	M (6' tall)
MORALE	Champion (16)
XP VALUE	11,000

A slender shadowy figure that can easily be mistaken for a man—at least until his clothes rot and reveal the tiny wings sprouting between his shoulder blades—Xanthon the Baneful is the Scourge of Swarms, the youngest of the ghazneths. In bad light, his fading humanity can be seen in his bladelike nose and the slender tuft of beard hanging from his chin. In better illumination, his face turns mantislike and skeletal, with hollow cheeks and ovoid eyes tinged the color of blood.

Xanthon became a ghazneth less than a year ago, after swearing vengeance on King Azoun IV. Although his transformation is far from complete, Xanthon is the eager instigator behind Cormyr's current troubles.

Combat: Young and reckless, Xanthon is spoiling for a fight. Xanthon enjoys a –2 initiative bonus during any round he is not surprised, while his Strength (18/45) gives him a +3 damage bonus. Xanthon suffers damage only from weapons made of cold-forged iron, regenerates 6 hp per round, and absorbs any magic used against him. (See the introduction for details.)

Xanthon cannot hide behind his wings, so he suffers the full effects of any spell striking his body, though only for as long as it takes to absorb the spell levels. Should he be killed, he instantly becomes undead and rises the following round, after he has used the magic to regenerate.

Xanthon's primary weapon is the power of swarms. See Ecology for more details on this power.

Habitat/Society: As the "scourge of the day," Xanthon is the only living ghazneth. His fellow ghazneths view him as an annoying younger brother, though they are grateful to him for digging them out of their tombs and tolerate his presence, as long as he doesn't presume to offer suggestions.

Ecology: Having been a ghazneth for less than a year, Xanthon can store only one magic level at a time. His life is a constant search for magic, which he expends as quickly as he absorbs it to make room for more. For each level he expends, he can:

1. *Detect magic* up to 1 mile away for one day; or
2. For one turn, automatically cause all poisonous, stinging, disease-bearing, and blood-sucking creatures within 1 yard of him to multiply 1d10 × 10 times; or
3. Regenerate 6 hit points; or
4. Infest any single building, campsite, field, copse, or similar area with a swarm of reptiles, rodents, insects, or arachnids (any species he chooses). This infestation requires 1 round per square yard of area. If Xanthon is forced to leave before the infestation is complete, only the vicinity around him is infested.
5. He may summon a swarm of 2d10 × 10 rodents and direct their actions in a general manner; there is 25% chance that such swarms bear a contagious and deadly disease.
6. He can imprint instructions on any single poisonous, disease-bearing, stinging, or blood-sucking creature he touches; such instructions are subject to mistakes and misinterpretations, and can never consist of more than fifteen words.

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Comic Book Campaigns

No matter what game you play, you can learn a lot from the funny books.

by Stephen Kenson

illustrated by David Day

RUNNING A GAME REQUIRES A DUNGEON MASTER (or Gamemaster) who is part storyteller, part referee, and part improvisational actor. There are many different techniques DMs can use to bring their games to life, and the best of these are often inspired by the techniques used to tell stories in other mediums, like movies, television, novels, or comic books.

Comic books have the advantage of being a highly visual medium, aimed at stories of action and adventure, much like roleplaying games. Comic books are also episodic like roleplaying games; each issue follows the next, like the adventures in a campaign. Comics use many techniques to tell an exciting story and keep readers coming back for more. These techniques are not limited to super-hero roleplaying games like the *Marvel Super Heroes™ Adventure Game*. There are sword & sorcery comics, like *Conan* and the out-of-print Dragonlance® and Forgotten Realms® comics, along with numerous science fiction and horror comics. Nearly any game can benefit from the techniques of comic-book storytelling.

Storytelling Techniques

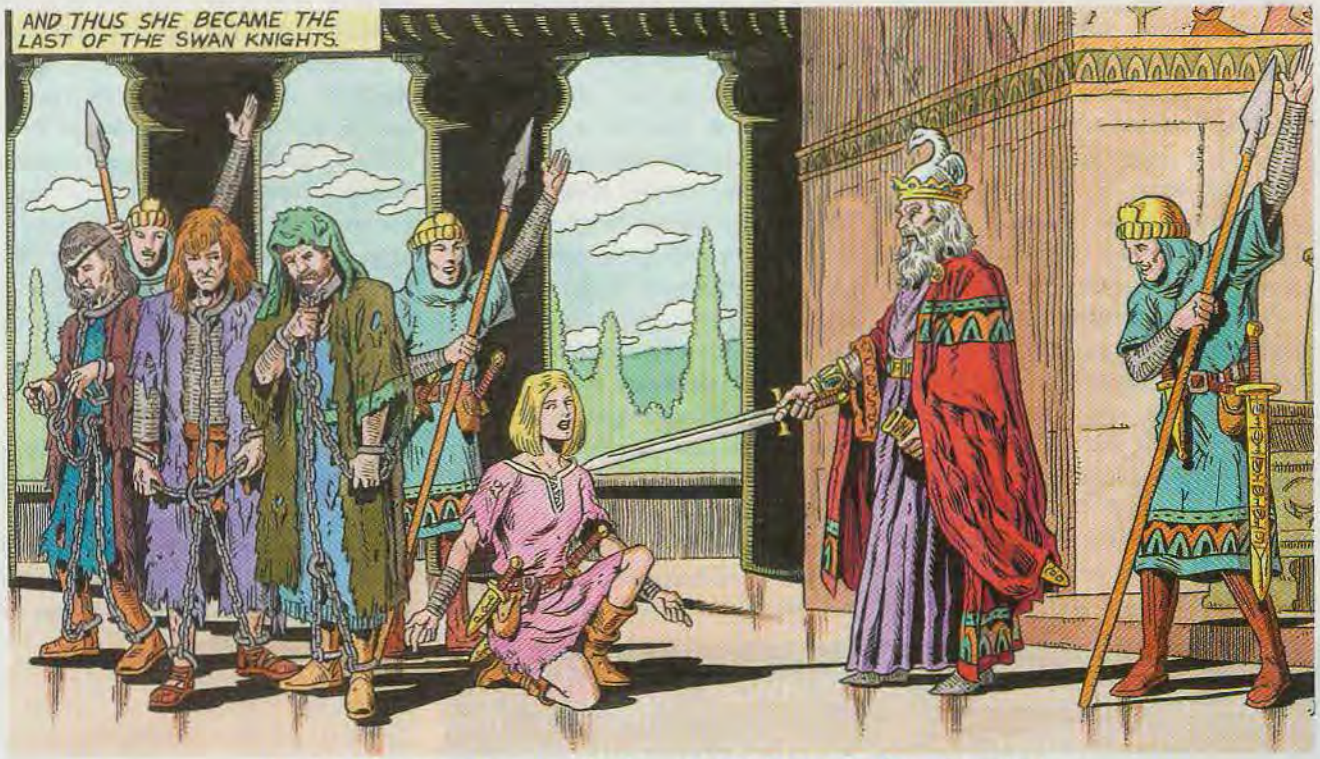
The first things to look at are some of the techniques used by the comics to tell stories. Comic books are strongly visual media. Unless you're possessed of large amounts of time and artistic ability, it's unlikely you can duplicate the spectacular visual effects of the comics, but you can still use many of their ideas.

Artwork

You can't draw a fully rendered comic book to showcase the adventures of your heroes—since that would leave the players out of the action—but you can still use comic-book terms in your game. Describe events in terms of page layout, panels, and comic artwork. Describe characters and scenes as drawn by particular comic-book artists whose work the players know. (There's a big difference between a Rob Liefield high-tech mercenary and one drawn by George Perez or Jack Kirby.) Use sound effects and familiar scenes from the comics to liven up the action. If you have access to a comics collection, show players actual comic book scenes to illustrate what you're describing. (A Jack Kirby picture of Asgard and the rainbow bridge Bifrost from *The Mighty Thor* is worth at least a thousand words of description.)

Splash Page

Comics traditionally start out with a "splash page," a full-page action illustration that pulls the reader immediately into the action. Consider starting your own games with a "splash page"



Flashbacks are a good way to tell a character's origin story, but keep them short.

of sorts by setting up some action to get players into the game right away. For example, start the adventure in the middle of a fight or a crisis to ignite the players' interest. Or have the heroes already en route to deal with some problem that has arisen when the game begins. This saves you the time of providing a lot of background exposition and gets the heroes right into the thick of things without having to worry about whether or not they will bite on your particular plot hook. Don't overuse this technique—sometimes it's good to start an adventure on a low-key note—but grabbing the players from the start helps ensure they'll get into the game.

Flashbacks

A comic book author can't assume that a reader has read every issue of a comic, or even the previous issue of a comic. Comic books often use flashback recaps to summarize important information for the reader, like the history of a particular villain or the origin of the hero. You can use this technique to provide information to your players as well. When dealing with a fully developed game setting as extensive as the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting, the STAR*DRIVE® campaign, or the Marvel Universe, you cannot assume that the players know the vital elements of the background.

A flashback might take place when one hero tells the others part of his or her origin. Having the heroes share origin stories can be fun, especially if the current adventure ties into their origins in some way. Villains are also fond of providing flashback information to heroes while they are helplessly trapped in the villain's latest fiendish deathtrap. This provides you with a good way of giving the players information about your villains: who they are, what their backgrounds are, and what their plans are.

Some players don't have the patience to deal with lengthy flashbacks. They don't want to talk about their background and would rather attack the villain before the miscreant launches into a monologue. It can be helpful to take such players aside and remind them how useful flashbacks can be for the other players and ask them to respect this particular convention of the genre. By the same token, don't turn every scene into a flashback. Keep the flashbacks short and the action moving.

Recaps

Recaps are similar to flashbacks. Since there is generally at least a month between issues, comics take a few panels to update the reader on what happened in previous issues, bringing the reader back up to speed with the current story. They usually start with something like "When last we left our heroes ..."

Likewise, since there is usually a week or more between roleplaying sessions, it is useful to start the game with a quick recap of the previous session. Get the players back into the feel of things, then pick up the action where it left off. If you planned carefully, the action from the last game ended at a good point for a splash to begin the next session (see Cliffhangers, below). For more on this technique, see the article "Picture This" from *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #253.

Asides

Asides are events and plot elements not directly related to the main plot. They usually involve supporting characters or

villains and take place while the heroes are not around. Although the heroes themselves are not present, it can be fun to give asides to the players, treating them like the readers of a comic book. An aside might simply be a description of a particular scene from the "reader's" point of view for the players, or it might involve the players temporarily taking on different roles to play out the aside.

For example, a villain's plot involves taking control of a military base and the top-secret experimental weapon it contains. Normally, you would start your adventure with the heroes receiving word from the government that the base has been captured. However, a comic book might start out with the villain capturing the base. So you give the players the roles of soldiers and officers at the base to play for the opening scene, where they are surprised by the villain and his minions. Perhaps one of the player-run soldiers is able to send a distress call or escape to warn the heroes. Then, when the heroes confront the villain, the military personnel he is using as hostages will have more meaning to the players than just stock characters.

You don't want to give away too much information and spoil your plot.

In another aside, the players can run some of the friends, family members, or loved ones of their heroes as they try to escape the clutches of a villain holding them hostage. Conversely, the friends and family might simply sit and wonder if the heroes will make it back from their latest adventure alive and well. Such roleplaying adds depth to the supporting characters and gives the players a better understanding and appreciation of them.

Foreshadowing

Asides can also be used to foreshadow upcoming events in a comic book story. Many comic book stories end with a scene of a mysterious shadowy figure plotting the downfall of the heroes. Although the heroes themselves are not aware of these behind-the-scenes machinations, consider letting the players in on them a little by providing a foreshadowing scene for an upcoming plotline or adventure. Describe the scene from the readers' point of view, and tell them what happens. Just like a comic-book writer, you don't want to give away too much information and spoil your plot. Tell them just enough to whet the players' appetites and make them wonder what's really going on.

Let's say you've got plans to reveal a dark secret from one hero's past. You decide to foreshadow it by describing a brief scene in which a mysterious person is sitting in a dimly lit room, completely surrounded by pictures and clippings of the hero's exploits. The figure cuts out a glossy photo of the hero from a recent magazine and looks at it. Then she says, in a deep and sultry voice, "You thought I was dead, but I survived. I'm so looking forward to seeing you again ... soon." As the picture is placed in a candle flame and ignites, the scene ends. Who is the mystery woman? What is her connection to the hero? And what are her plans? These are the questions your players will be wondering, and they'll be looking forward to getting the answers!

Cliffhangers

If you're running a simple one-shot adventure, feel free to wrap things up neatly at the end—although definitely leave room for a "Next Issue Blurb" (below). On the other hand, if the adventure you are running is ongoing, either a limited series or a regular game, then try to end the game with a high-tension cliffhanger that leaves the players wanting more and has them looking forward to the next game. Try to keep an eye on the time and the flow of the game to gauge the best time to end that session. Sometimes getting to the right point for a cliffhanger ending requires ending the game a little earlier or later than you planned.

For example, a group of super heroes are being set up by an evil villain using android duplicates to convince the authorities that the heroes are committing crimes. As the heroes covertly investigate the scene of one of the crimes, looking for clues, the wall bursts in to reveal ... the Mighty Avengers! Captain America steps forward and says, "Sorry, but we've got to bring you in." End of session. When the next time to play rolls around, the players are all going to be looking forward to it, wondering what's going to happen next.

The Comic Book Series

The structure of a comic book series is fairly straightforward: One issue follows another, usually on a monthly basis. Comic book publishers have devised many different formats and styles for comic books that can also be used as models for your game.

Ongoing Series

The basic model is the ongoing series. This is just like a regular comic book series: One adventure follows another in the series, just like issues of a comic book. In fact, you may want to number your adventures and treat them like issues of a comic book. At the beginning of the adventure, tell the players, "Okay, this is Issue Number Eight of the Star Wanderers, entitled 'Into the Void!'" It gives the players an immediate feel for the game, just like they were about to read a comic book. Like a regular comic series, your campaign can have multipart story arcs and single issue stories.

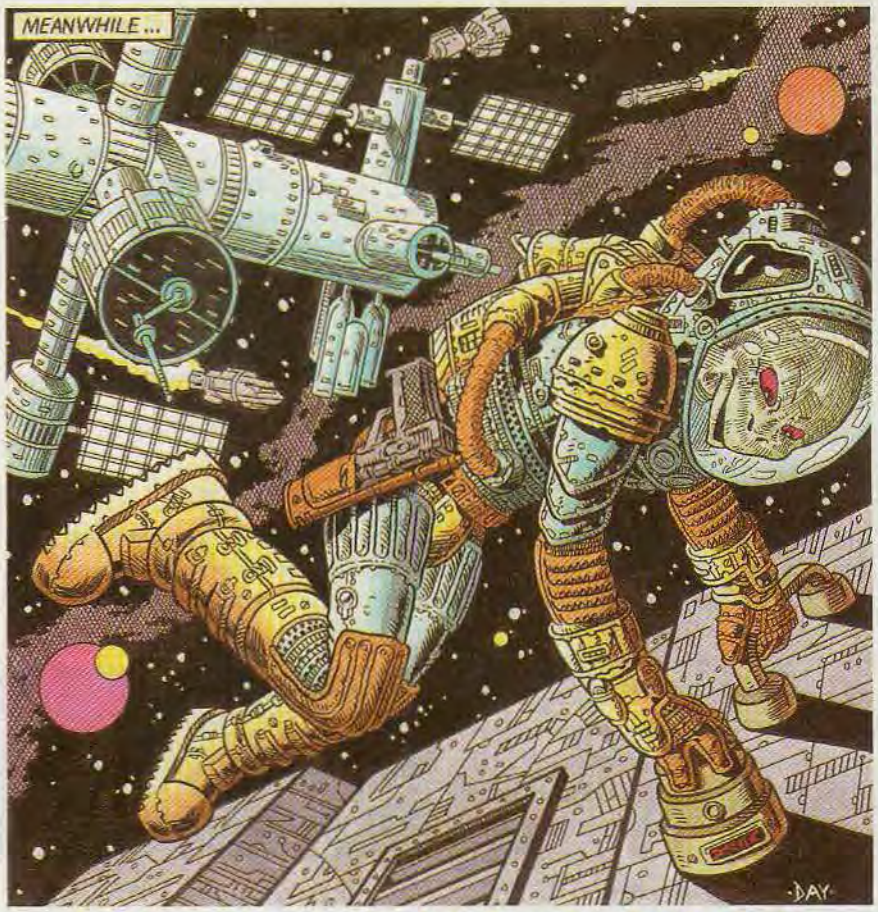
Limited Series

A limited series has a definite beginning and end. Oftentimes it features a character or team who can't sustain an ongoing series, or it focuses on a special event for a character and team with an ongoing series. A limited series tends to run 4, 6, or 12 issues, but has to run only as long as needed to tell the story. You can run a limited series as a way of introducing new players to a game. If they like it, their heroes can spin off into an ongoing series, as is often the case in the comics. You can also run a limited series as a special event in your ongoing series or as a change-of-pace, allowing the players to play different heroes for a short while.

For example, you might take a break from your ongoing Avengers series to run an Invaders limited series, where the players take the roles of heroes during World War II. Then, after four issues, it's back to the regular series. Who knows? Maybe a Nazi menace the Invaders fought in the limited series will show up in the regular Avengers series!

Solo Limited Series

A limited series often spotlights a single hero. You can do this in a game, too. One way is to get together with one player and run the game one-on-one, giving the player's hero a chance at some solo action. You can involve the other players by having them take the roles of characters in the solo story, either supporting characters for the hero or playing the villains. Then, when its time for a different hero to get a solo series, the players switch roles. A solo limited series can also be fun to run with a player outside of the game using resources like email and Internet chat rooms, so the solo adventure doesn't take up regular game time.



Foreshadowing is a great narrative device if you can avoid spoiling the plot.

Graphic Novel

A graphic novel is a longer comic book story that often deals with more mature themes and complex plots than those of an ongoing series. They are also used for special events involving heroes from an ongoing series. You can set up a game as a "graphic novel" adventure for your regular group of heroes. This might be a particularly harrowing adventure for the heroes, involving more complex plots and themes, such as the Marvel Graphic Novel *God Loves, Man Kills* for the *Uncanny X-Men*. It might be used to kick off an ongoing series, like the *New Mutants* Graphic Novel. With the right group of players, a more mature plot can create a dramatic story.

One-Shot or Special

Comic companies occasionally produce "one-shots" or "specials" that are self-contained stories. You can run one-shots as special adventures, outside the regular ongoing series. They can feature characters from the ongoing series, either the regular heroes or other characters. It can be interesting to give players in a one-shot a chance to play other characters from the regular series: either supporting characters, guest heroes, or even villains. A one-shot can also provide a change-of-pace by allowing players to run completely different heroes.

Crossover Series

A regular feature of comics is the "crossover," an event that pulls in a multitude of diverse heroes and takes place across many different comic books, usually linked together by a limited series. The Marvel comics have numerous examples, from "The Secret Wars" to "Acts of Vengeance" and "Atlantis Attacks!" It can be fun to set up your own crossover event or to use a crossover event currently running in the comics. A crossover is an excellent opportunity for guest stars to put in appearances. They can also be a great place to run one-shot adventures where players take the roles of other heroes. For example, in a crossover, the players might play their regular heroes in the first adventure, then switch to another group of heroes in the next, showing how they deal with the crisis. Then it's back to the regular heroes, then on to another group of heroes, and so forth.

If you happen to be fortunate enough to know other gaming groups, you can even run a "crossover" between your groups, coordinating an event that exchanges heroes and even players between groups for a while. With the Internet, you can coordinate online "crossover" events between groups, allowing the Gamemasters to exchange information, each controlling part of the master plot.

Annual

Many ongoing comics series have a special annual issue. An annual might contain a major story related to the ongoing series or it might feature one of the different types of stories described here, like a crossover, untold tale, or alternate story. Annuals can even contain multiple short

stories. You can use the annual to mark a special event in your ongoing series or to tell an expanded story. If you add an annual to your ongoing series, make it a special event, both the adventure and the game. Consider making the annual part of a gaming-group party, for example. An annual is also a good place to have major events that shake up the status-quo of the series, like a hero leaving or joining the group, the death of a hero or major character, and so forth.

Untold Tales

In an ongoing series, not all stories need to follow one after the other. It can be fun to delve into the past to tell an "untold tale." It might be based on a minor event that was glossed over in a previous adventure. If you take good adventure notes, you might anticipate such opportunities in advance. Alternatively, you might tell a story with no previous connections, a true untold tale. If the players are running experienced heroes, an untold tale is also a great opportunity to go back into the "early years," playing the heroes as they were when they first began their careers. There is an example of an "untold tale" in the *X-Men: Who Goes There?* adventure for the MARVEL SUPER HEROES game, where the players play the original X-Men as they were in the first year of that series.

The only tricky thing with untold tales is making sure what happens in the past matches up with the future. If you run an untold tale with a group of heroes and one of them dies, he'd better come back to life by the end of the story, or players will lose faith in you. The fun part is that you can take things introduced in an untold tale and have them show up in the ongoing series to plague the players later. "Look, it's that villain we fought years ago! I thought he was dead!"

Back-Up Stories

Some comics feature "back-up" stories. These are short (8–12 page) stories, often featuring minor heroes. It can be fun to occasionally run a back-up story at the end of a regular adventure. The story has to be very brief, usually no more than a single encounter, but it provides a chance to spotlight other heroes. For example, the sidekicks of a group of heroes might get together and have a night out when something goes awry. Try running a short adventure in which the regular heroes must remain in their secret identities and handle a crisis, like being caught in a bank robbery with no chance to slip away for a quick costume change. Back-up stories might also be untold tales that reveal something about a hero's past.

What If? Stories

A popular trend in comics is the "what if?" story, where the heroes adventure in a parallel world where things are somewhat familiar but also quite different from the main setting. One example is the "Age of Apocalypse" series for the X-Men, which features a universe where Professor X never formed the X-Men and Apocalypse conquered the world. Magneto formed a different group of X-Men here—rebels fighting against Apocalypse and his minions.

A really fun change-of-pace story is to set up a "what if?" story for the heroes, either as a one-shot or a limited series. Take any event from the series or setting you're running and ask, "What if it happened differently?" You can create many alternate universes just by changing one event. In fact, you might even want to set an ongoing series in a "what if?" universe, giving you more control over the events that happen and the ability to mess with established history with impunity.

You can create many alternate universes just by changing one event.

Reader Features

Comic books have several features designed for readers that you can use to enhance your own games.

Next Issue Blurbs

Comics usually have a brief "Next Issue" blurb at the end to tell readers what's coming up. You can do the same by providing a teaser at the end of each adventure. "Next issue, it's the Avengers vs. the Thunderbolts, with the fate of the world hanging in the balance!" This helps to whet the players' appetite for the next adventure.

Letter Column

Okay, your players probably don't write you letters about your games. However, you should encourage player feedback just like the letter column of a comic book features the readers' opinions about the comic. It's important to know what the players are and are not enjoying about the series. When players offer complaints or criticism, listen to their concerns and think about how you can make the game better. By the same token, when players offer praise, take that into account. If they like something you're doing, try to repeat it.

Character Guide

Comic companies sometimes publish guides or handbooks about the characters in their universe. You can write up new heroes and villains from your series in the same style as, say, *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*. This gives the players a chance to flesh out elements of their heroes' background. If someone in the group can draw, pictures of the heroes are an even better way to help everyone visualize their characters. The clearer the players' image of their heroes, the more they will get into the spirit of the game and the more fun they'll have.

Steve Kenson is a freelance writer, comic book collector, and longtime Dungeon Master. He thinks DMs need to stick together and share what they come up with. Anyone who tries out these techniques or who has some of their own to share can contact him via e-mail at **talonmail@aol.com.**

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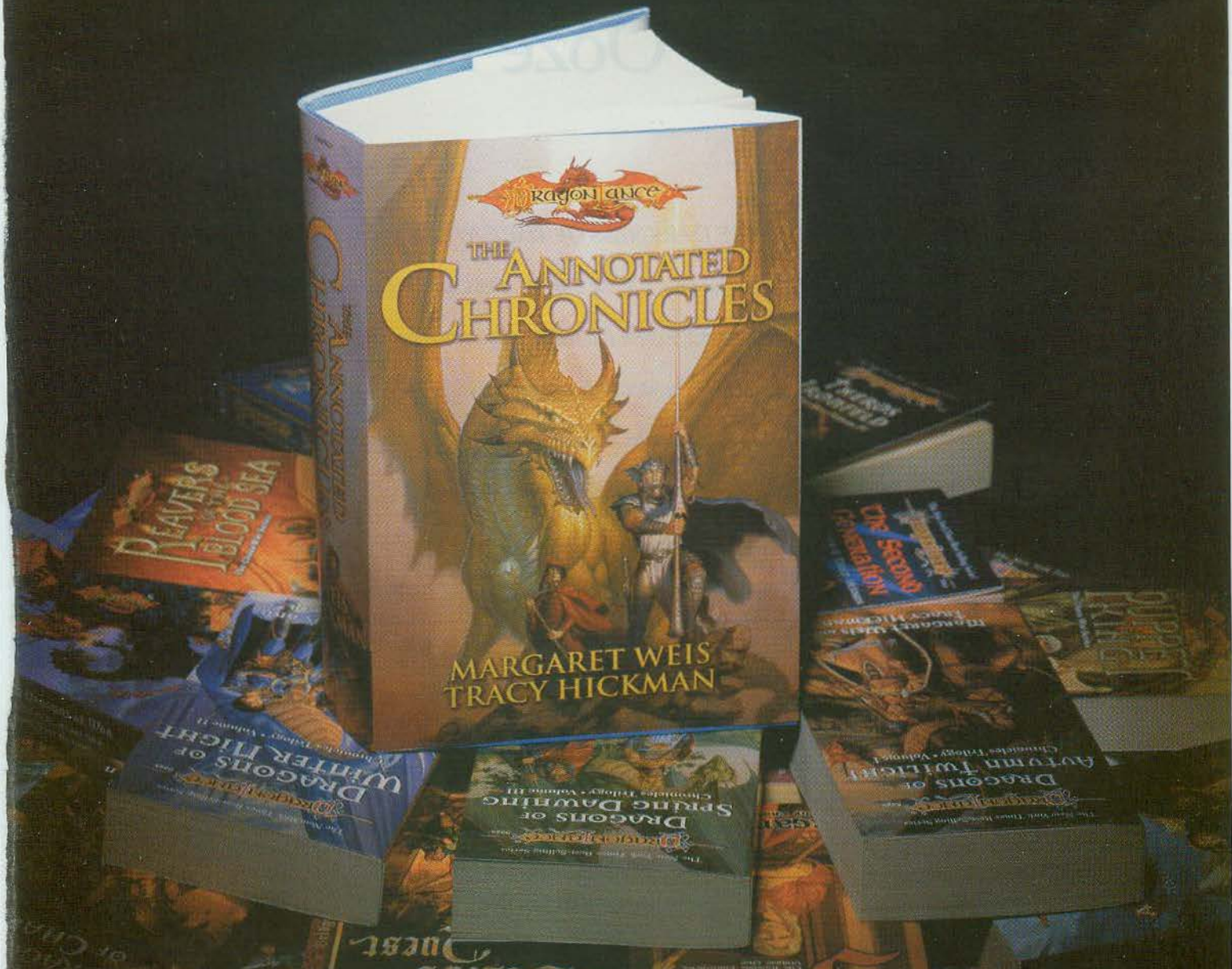

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THE ECOLOGY OF THE GRAY OOZE

Ooze There?

Especially in the Underdark, be careful you don't step in something nasty.

by
Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by
Terry Dykstra

IN THE DARKNESS OF THE CAVERN'S INTERIOR, THERE STOOD a pile of stones. On the surface, there was nothing extraordinary about them: gray, round, maybe the size of a fist, perhaps a little bigger.

One of the stones, however, was worthy of closer examination, for it was no stone at all. This became apparent once it began to move. Rocking back and forth in little starts and jerks, it finally split open, and its liquid contents oozed slowly onto the cavern floor.

Having freed itself from its tiny prison, the ooze creature returned to the split halves of its former stone-shaped cell, engulfing them with its own pliant body. The creature's gray-toned skin glistened as if wet; covering the fake stone fully, it did a passable impression of a wet stone itself.

Over the next few minutes, the wet stone seemed to collapse into itself, like a sealed waterskin with a leak in its side. When the gray creature finally crawled away, twice as big as it had been when it first emerged from its shell, there was no sign of the fake stone.[1]

"A cave?" cried Shandrilla, anger rising in her voice. She threw her oar into the bottom of the canoe and frowned at her gnomish companions still crawling out of the boat. "You didn't say anything about a cave!"

Federico ignored her and concentrated on dragging the canoe onto the beach. Let Javorik deal with the silly human girl, he thought. That was his job anyway.

"Now, now, calm down," said Javorik, hands upraised as if to fend off blows from the young woman. "If you recall, I explained to you that Federico and I had come across a locked chest and needed your expertise to get it open."

"But you said it was on an island on the lake! An island, not a cave!"

"An island with a cave," corrected Javorik. "Didn't I make that clear?"

"You know well and good you didn't, gnome!" snarled Shandrilla, crossing her arms and frowning at the tiny illusionist.

"Then it was my mistake," admitted Javorik. "But nonetheless, the situation remains: There is a locked chest inside the cave that is much too heavy for Federico and me to carry, and we need your help to get it open. Once it's open, we can throw its contents into Little Biggie here"—the gnome held out his bag of

1. Gray oozes reproduce asexually by budding. After a large meal, the ooze splits off a small pod from its body and leaves it in an out-of-the-way place. This pod looks like a small stone (its thick, leathery shell even masks the unborn ooze's own body heat from infravision) and takes 2–3 days to develop into a new ooze. Once it "hatches," the newborn ooze absorbs the shell into its body and wanders off in search of other food.

holding and patted it affectionately—"and then we head back for home and split the loot three ways."

The young thief narrowed her eyes at the gnome and pursed her lips as if thinking it over.

"I brought torches this time," he said, pulling three of them out from under his robes and grinning up at his young friend in what he hoped was a lovable and irresistible manner.

"Hmmph," snorted Shandrilla, but she grabbed a torch and lit it with the contents of her tinderbox.

"Glad that's over with," muttered Federico under his breath, accepting a lit torch from his cousin. "Let's go," he said louder, leading the trio into the cave.

A few seconds later, several voices emanated from the cave. "Stairs down? You mean a tunnel network? You didn't say anything about an underground tunnel network!"

"Didn't I? My mistake."

Several weeks had passed, and the creature had grown many times over. Its life was a simple one, focused on the constant search for food. The dark-colored beast ambled slowly along the tunnels and corridors of its subterranean home, stopping only to feed upon living or once-living flesh.[2]

The creature came across the carcass of a human warrior, brushing up against it during its travels.[3] *The warrior had apparently been slain in a rockfall trap—only his legs and lower torso extended from the small pile of rocks at the end of this particular corridor. The creature oozed onto the warrior's metal-clad legs, covering him like a snug blanket. Then, releasing its acid through the pores that covered its surface,*[4] *the creature began the process of eating away the metal to get to the meat inside.*[5]

After eating through the upper surface of the platemail armor and devouring the warrior's lower body, the creature began the slower process of eating its way up into the warrior's upper half while leaving the armor intact. This took longer, as the creature had less surface area to work on at any given time, but it allowed the ooze to feast upon the warrior's entire carcass without being crushed under the weight of the rocks that had slain the man in the first place. When the creature was finished, it slithered backward out of the armor[6] *and oozed away down another corridor.*

Shandrilla swung her torch back and forth before her, trying to dispel the shadows that seemed to creep up toward her. Her short sword was drawn and clenched in a white-knuckled grip in her right hand. Gods, how she hated being underground!

"How much farther?" she called out, shivering in her leather armor.

"Oh, we're nearly there," replied Javorik, holding his torch near the wall and giving it a thorough visual inspection. "I think."

"You think?"

"Well, I'm pretty sure it was around here somewhere. Wasn't it?" he asked Federico. His cousin answered with a noncommittal grunt. "Anyway, when we found the chest, it was in a little alcove cut into the side of the tunnel. We didn't want anyone finding it while we went back and got you, so I sealed it off with an illusion."

"Of what?"

"Of what? Of a stone wall, naturally. Turned out really good, too. One of my better illusions, if I say so myself."

"So we're looking for a section of wall that looks just like the rest of the wall?"

"Well, essentially, yes."

"Are we even in the right section of tunnel?"

Javorik pursed his lips and stroked absently at his beard while looking up and down both ends of the corridor. "I think so. I'm pretty sure. Maybe."

"Oh, great," muttered Shandrilla.

The creature's travels brought it to a group of kobolds. The small beings were apparently unaware of the ooze's presence, for they did not move away as it slithered slowly upon them. Instinct overtook the ooze, and it slowed its pace even more, wary lest a sudden movement give away its presence and frighten off its prey.[7]

2. With a movement rate of 1, the gray ooze would probably starve if it had to subsist upon prey that it could chase down, especially since it is unable to climb up walls or across ceilings. Fortunately, gray oozes are adept dungeon scavengers, surviving on whatever scraps of food they come across in their wanderings. Blessed with a slow metabolism, the gray ooze can go for weeks between meals, but it does eat whenever it comes across food—eating is an instinctive behavior, not the result of any pangs of hunger.

3. The outer surface of a gray ooze's body is covered by many tiny pits and grooves. While these pits aid the creature in looking like a section of rock, they also serve a more useful purpose: They provide the ooze with its only long-range sense of the world around it. Each pit is similar in function to those of a pit viper—helping the ooze to detect various levels of heat at a range of 30 feet.

This heat sense, while in many respects similar to infravision, is not really a true form of vision. It allows the ooze to detect warm-blooded creatures near it, but does little to give the ooze a sense of the world around it. The vast majority of its surroundings—caverns, rocks, stalactites, and stalagmites—do not even "appear" on its heat sense, as they have the same ambient temperature. Thus, the ooze must depend upon its sense of touch to determine the details of its environment, as it lacks a sense of sight, hearing, and smell.

Dead bodies soon take on the same temperature as their environment and thus soon become "invisible" to the gray ooze's heat sense. For this reason, an ooze only eats carrion that it happens to bump into—the creature cannot detect carrion unless it's in physical contact with the dead flesh.

4. The gray ooze's acid is its most powerful offensive attack, inflicting 2d8 points of damage upon enemies with each successful blow. This acid eats away flesh and metal but has no effect on either stone or wood. Because the acid pores cover the ooze's entire body, the creature can attack anyone or anything coming into contact with it. Thus, not only does it inflict acid damage to creatures it attacks but also any metal weapons used against a gray ooze have a chance of being dissolved. (The weapon must make a save vs. acid as per Table 29: Item Saving Throws on page 39 of the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*.)

It takes 1 round for a gray ooze to eat its way through chainmail or a metal weapon, and 2 rounds to eat through platemail. Each magical "plus" of the armor or weapon adds another round—a *longsword* +2 would take a gray ooze 3 rounds to dissolve.

When in combat with a living creature, the ooze strikes like a snake. Having no real "front" or "back," the creature is free to raise either end of its oblong body (but not both in the same round) to strike at enemies.

Obviously, acid attacks on a dead body (the majority of a gray ooze's meals) are automatically successful each round. Flowing over the intended meal, the ooze coats it with acid each round and absorbs the liquefied remains through countless tiny mouths on its underside. Once a carcass reaches –20 hit points, it is considered totally dissolved—at which point it cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*.

5. Although the gray ooze can dissolve metal, it gains no nutritional benefit from the act. Therefore, unlike a rust monster (which corrodes all metal within reach of its antennae and gains nourishment by doing so), the gray ooze corrodes metal with its acid only if the situation requires it—specifically, if it is being attacked with a metal weapon or if its intended prey is covered in metallic armor.

6. A gray ooze moves by undulating the underside of its body, much like a worm, slug, or snail. These waves of motion are not visible on the ooze's upper surface. As the ooze's body tends to be roughly oval in shape, it can move "forward" or "backward" (parallel to its longest axis) but, because of the way its muscles are aligned, not "sideways" (perpendicular to its longest axis).

While a gray ooze cannot climb vertical surfaces, it is capable of "climbing" stairs. It can also travel up inclines as great as 45°, although anything steeper than 30° causes it to inch along at half speed.

7. Instinctively, a gray ooze knows that most other creatures are capable of moving at greater speeds that it does. Thus, when it senses nearby prey, it does one of two things: either it freezes com-

The three kobolds were huddled together in animated conversation. Had the creature possessed ears, it might have heard what it was they argued about. Had it possessed eyes, it might have picked up a glimpse of their gestures and perhaps deduced that their attention, for the moment, was fixed elsewhere. However, it had neither ears nor eyes, nor did it have the mental capacity with which to draw conclusions. It was a primal creature, concerned only with its next meal. It therefore raised one end of its body into a striking position and slowly, laboriously, inched toward its prey.

The kobolds remained oblivious to their impending doom. Only when the creature lashed out, slamming into the nearest of the three and smothering him with its body, did the others react. With squeals of terror, the other two dropped their weapons and raced off in the opposite direction with no thought of helping their companion.

The creature oozed over its prey, releasing its acid through the numerous pores covering its body. The kobold thrashed and jerked, then lay still as the ooze's juices did their work.

This time, the digestion process was different. As the kobold's body was broken down and absorbed, the ooze felt a new sensation, a tingling as it devoured its prey. The tingling was like a series of tiny vibrations traveling down the length of the ooze's form.

As the ooze flowed away from its latest meal, the tingling continued.[8]

Shandrilla sang a little song under her breath as she pounded the walls with the butt end of her torch: "Gonna kill me a gnome, kill me a gnome, kill me a gnome and then I'll go on home ..." She knew deep down that she didn't mean it, but it kept her mind off the flickering shadows and the knowledge that literally tons of earth and rock were between her and the open skies. All it would take was a simple earthquake, a relatively minor shifting of stone, and she'd be buried here forever.

She shivered at the thought and continued tapping at the wall on her left. Across from her, Federico was doing the same to the wall on the right with the hilt of his sword, while Javorik walked on ahead and had the nerve to look puzzled. "I know it's around here somewhere," he said, scratching his head.

"Gonna kill me a gnome, kill me a gnome ..." sang Shandrilla under her breath.

The creature oozed along a passageway, narrowly missing a lizard that scuttled by in panic at the amorphous being's close proximity.[9] *Obliviously passing it by, the creature came across a series of stairs carved into the rock. Raising its front end, it thrust itself up several of the stairs at once, dragging the rest of its body up with it. By repeating the actions, it gradually made its way up the winding stairs.*

Over time, the creature had grown substantially. It had managed to catch up not only with the two kobolds that had escaped it earlier but also with many more of their kind, often taking them unawares as they slept.[10] *Now, it was three feet wide and nearly twelve feet long. The creature's diet of living kobolds had increased the tingling sensation it had first felt upon devouring its first live prey, and it now had several previously unknown abilities. Primary among these was the capacity to throw waves of psionic energy at potential victims, often immobilizing them until the ooze could get within range to engulf them with its acidic body.*[11] *This ability had been put to good use among the kobolds, picking them off one by one until what was left of the small tribe had fled for different parts. Now, finding the tunnels with which it was familiar empty of life, the creature was forced to search elsewhere for food.*

Coming to the top of the stairs, the creature found itself upon an entirely different level of the tunnel network. Who knew what potential food could be found in these uncharted halls? Randomly picking a direction, the creature oozed off.

"Aha!" cried Javorik in triumph. "I knew we'd find it!"

Shandrilla pulled her hand back through the "wall" she had discovered. "We? There's no 'we' involved, gnome—I found it." She wouldn't admit it to her

pletely, remaining perfectly motionless and hoping for the prey to blunder into the ooze, or it stealthily creeps up on the potential victims, raising its nearest end into "snake-strike stance." Often, it remains motionless at first as it assesses the situation, creeping up only if the victims have not moved after several minutes.

8. Devouring carrion provides a gray ooze with nourishment. Devouring living prey provides a gray ooze with nourishment and much more: an increase in its psionic potential.

As an ooze dissolves an intelligent being's body, it simultaneously incorporates the neurons of its victim's brain into a weblike network of psionic fibers that runs the length of its body. After enough victims have been "harvested," the psionic network "kicks in" and the gray ooze enjoys limited psionic powers forever after.

Psionics only appear in gray oozes with at least 20 hit points. (As 3+3 HD creatures, they have a range of 6–27 hit points.) Oozes of less than 20 hit points may have a well-established psionic neural network, but they are not yet of adequate size for their powers to manifest. (The network not only requires a fixed number of linkages, but they must be spaced apart enough to function properly.) Since only freshly killed prey can offer the ooze the material with which it adds to its neural network, it is possible for an ooze to fulfill the size requirement without having the requisite network complexity to allow its psionic potential to be realized. This gives the DM the option of having large, non-psionic gray oozes in his campaign.

In any case, once the neural network begins functioning, the ooze gains the following psionic abilities: *psychic crush* (the victim must save vs. paralyzation or suffer 1d8 points of damage), *mind blank*, and a variant of *psionic sense* that allows it to sense any psionics in use within 60 feet at no cost. Psionic oozes have a power score of 13 and a pool of 21–121 (1d100 + 20) PSPs from which to draw. Note that the gray ooze has two psionic disciplines (Telepathy, Metapsionics), no sciences, and two devotions (*psychic crush, psionic sense*), not 2/1/1 as erroneously listed in the *Monstrous Manual*™ book and the *Complete Psionics Handbook*.

A psionic ooze begins with a pool of 21 PSPs. Thereafter, each time it devours freshly slain prey, 1d10 PSPs are added to its pool. The victims need not be psionic in nature themselves, merely intelligent enough to provide a suitably complex brain with which the ooze can expand its internal network. Devouring a psionic victim does not grant the ooze additional psionic powers, nor does it add any more PSPs to the ooze's psionic pool than a non-psionic victim would.

9. The gray ooze's heat sense applies only to warm-blooded beings. Reptiles, insects, arachnids, and the like are effectively "invisible" to the ooze's heat sense, as are all forms of undead and animated creatures made of nonliving material, such as golems. An ooze attacks such creatures only if they happen to come into physical contact with them, and they "taste" living. (An ooze would not attack a stone golem that stepped upon it, as it would realize it was not edible.) Zombies and ghouls, and, to a lesser extent, skeletons, are valid sources of food to the gray ooze, although in no cases can undead creatures contribute to the ooze's psionic network.

10. Gray oozes do not require sleep. They do occasionally remain motionless in one area, waiting for prey to pass within range, but this is actually a form of passive hunting, and the ooze is conscious and aware of its surroundings at all times.

11. Once a gray ooze realizes its psionic potential, its hunting strategies alter. Psionic oozes prefer to remain motionless, hidden in the shadows, and attack a single individual repeatedly with its *psychic crush*. With luck, it kills its chosen victim without even revealing its presence, and can then devour it at its leisure. A gray ooze isn't concerned with others that may escape, so long as it has a meal to devour. After all, it can only eat one victim at a time anyway, and there will be plenty of opportunities to catch up

companion, but it was a pretty impressive illusion.

"Pretty impressive, huh, Shanny?" asked the gnome, as if reading her thoughts. "Illusionary wall is one of my better spells. Look at how seamlessly it merges with the rest of the stone!"

"Yeah, really nice," said the thief. "Can we get on with it now?"

Javorik made a face, harrumphed, and then acquiesced. "Follow me, then," he said, walking through the wall. "Federico will stand guard."

Shandrilla took a deep breath and followed the gnome through the wall. She expected some resistance, but there was none.

The chest looked ancient. It was huge, probably three feet wide and half again as long; no wonder the two gnomes couldn't budge it! There was no telling what was inside it, although Shandrilla could imagine all sorts of riches. But first there was the lock to deal with.

Passing her torch to Javorik, she knelt, sat on her feet, and spread the contents of her lockpicking kit on the ground before her. All thoughts of being underground in a confined space dissolved as her mind focused on the task at hand.

The creature oozed around a corner and felt three beings directly ahead with its heat sense.[12] *It came to a complete halt and assessed the situation.*

The three victims were all roughly the same size, about as big as the kobolds that had kept the ooze well fed for so many months.[13] *Neither of the three was moving away from the ooze. Two held torches, and the heat from the fires blazed brightly in the ooze's heat sense.*

After several minutes, during which time neither of the victims moved much, the creature targeted the closest as its next meal. It cast out with the powers of its mind, making contact with its victim and attempting to overload his mind in a psychic crush ...

"Argh!" grunted Federico. Javorik looked over at the illusionary wall but, of course, saw nothing. Shandrilla continued working at the chest's lock with her picks.

"Hey, hold that light steady!" she called to her companion.

"Ugh!" came Federico's voice from behind the wall, followed by the sound of his sword clattering to the stone floor.

Javorik poked his head, hand, and torch out from the wall and took a quick peek around. His cousin had fallen to his knees, temples held in his gauntleted hands, eyes scrunched tight in pain. A glistening patch of stone seemed to be gliding silently toward him.

"Shanny!" screamed Javorik. "Pudding!"[14]

Shandrilla poked her head out of the illusionary wall. "Not again!" she cried plaintively. "Why does it always have to be puddings?"

Javorik reached for the wand of lightning he kept stashed in his belt. Seeing the motion, Shandrilla grabbed his arm and pulled him to the side. "Not lightning!" she cried. "Remember what happened last time you tried that stunt on a

pudding? You take care of Federico; I'll handle this." With that, she grabbed her torch back from the little gnome and advanced upon the creeping mass of slick ooze.

"Hah, take that!" she cried as she flung the torch onto the center of the creature's mass. She expected the beast to ignite at once; instead, the flame sputtered and went out. The wooden torch rolled off the thing's back and clattered to the ground as the creature slithered inexorably closer.

"Oh crud," she said.

The ooze was surprised when one of the three kobold-sized creatures suddenly grew to almost twice its initial height, but that didn't stop it from bearing down upon its prey. It also saw that the victim it had brought down with the power of its mind was being aided by the other short one. This didn't concern the creature, for the tall one was approaching it even now. One victim would do as well as another.

to the others later.

12. Not having the normal senses of vision, hearing, or smell, gray oozes are immune to most illusions unless they are directly targeted against their heat sense, which would require a wizard not only to be aware of the gray ooze's sensory capabilities, but to have experienced them firsthand himself, perhaps through the use of a *shapechange* spell. Needless to say, tailor-made illusions targeted specifically against gray oozes are extremely rare. Thus, the gray ooze senses Shandrilla and Javorik even though they are on the other side of an *illusionary wall*. Oozes are likewise immune to spells and similar attacks that normally blind or deafen opponents.

13. The ooze's heat sense gives it only a two-dimensional outline of warm-blooded creatures—effectively a silhouette. It therefore cannot tell the difference between a standing gnome and a kneeling human, as they are roughly the same size in those positions. Similarly, an ooze couldn't distinguish between a centaur and a man astride a horse, provided it was "viewing" them head-on. In any case, the type of victim is unimportant to the gray ooze, which generally heads for the nearest potential prey.

14. At first glance, a gray ooze might easily be mistaken for a black pudding if the observer hasn't seen both creatures before. Both the gray ooze and the black pudding are blobby, amorphous beings that crawl low to the ground. In the flickering light of a torch or lantern, it's hard to tell the difference between dark gray and pure black. Even when battle begins, both creatures rely upon an acid-based attack to destroy their victims.

There are differences, of course, enough to dispel the belief that the two creatures are closely related. The gray ooze isn't nearly as flexible as the pudding, for one thing. While a pudding can drastically alter its shape, oozing through the smallest of cracks, the gray ooze remains essentially a thick, oval carpet, unable to compress itself thinner than 6 inches or so. Puddings are capable of traveling along walls and ceilings, while oozes cannot. While lightning and blows from weapons cause a pudding to split into two, they inflict normal damage to the ooze. On the other hand, the gray ooze is immune to nearly all spells (save those dealing with electricity, as mentioned above), a trait not shared by the pudding. Furthermore, the gray ooze is immune to the effects of fire. And while it hasn't been stated before in the MONSTROUS MANUAL book or other sources, it should be assumed that gray oozes are immune to acid

The tall one flung fire onto its back. The ooze could sense the flame's heat but felt no pain from the brief contact before the torch rolled onto the floor and was extinguished.[15]

The tall one turned and fled, as had many potential victims before. The creature attempted to use its psionic attack, but it had depleted its energy on attacking the smaller prey.[16] *Therefore, it did the only thing it could: it began following its fleeing victim. Eventually its prey would tire and sleep, while the ooze would not ...*

Shandrilla caught up to Javorik dragging a near-unconscious Federico down the hallway, their lone remaining torch clenched in his teeth. "Trade you," she said, grabbing the gnomish warrior under the armpits.

"Any luck with the pudding?" asked Javorik.

"See for yourself. This one seems to be fireproof." As the illusionist held the torch out, the dark-hued creature oozed into the range of the light.

"Hmm, must be a different kind. Well, let's see what I can do." He spoke the words of a mirror image spell, and immediately the corridor was filled with six Javoriks. "That oughtta confuse him," all six said in unison.

No such luck. Although Shandrilla had lost track of which Javorik was the real one, the pudding apparently hadn't. It kept following the same one, wherever he went. "No good!" she called. By this time, the pudding had forced the six Javoriks to back up nearly to Shandrilla's position, so she lugged Federico back another twenty feet or so. "Man, you're a heavy little guy," she commented. Federico just groaned, head lolling to the side.

Meanwhile, the six Javoriks were casting a light spell upon the creature. Nothing happened.[17] "That's odd," they all said, and nodded as if agreeing with each other.

"Quit messing around!" yelled Shandrilla. "Do you have magic missile?"

The Javoriks took time to look scornfully at the young Thief. "Oh, that's such a crass spell," they complained. "No finesse at all. I might as well just hurl a fireball and be done with it."

"It's going to be done with you if you don't *watch out*!" Shandrilla screamed. The creature plowed through two of the illusionists. Fortunately, both were mirror images and popped out of existence upon contact.

"Just do it!" yelled the young thief, dragging Federico farther down the corridor. "And hurry! We're almost out of hallway!"

"Very well," said the four remaining Javoriks, casting the spell. Flashes of light streaked from their fingertips to strike the creature from all angles.

It didn't even slow down.

Shandrilla hit the wall with her back. They had been chased down into a dead end, and now they were trapped. She felt a scream rising in her throat, trying to get out.

"Where's my sword?" asked Federico suddenly, struggling to rise to his feet.

"Back there, past the beast," said Shandrilla.

"Then give me yours," he commanded. "Can you climb that wall?"

Shandrilla pulled her short sword from the scabbard at her hip and looked at the rough-hewn wall. "Yeah, I think so," she said.

"Off you go then," said Federico, grabbing her weapon. "Climb past the beast, get my sword, and head back here. I think we'll be sorely needing your help by then."

The prey was acting strangely. The size-changing one was somewhat smaller again, dragging one of the constantly small ones, the one crippled by the ooze's psychic crush, away. The other one stood still, waving its limbs around, then backing farther away.

These actions were incomprehensible to the ooze. Still, it didn't concern itself with what its prey did, so long as they could eventually be caught and consumed.

Now the tall one was making its way up the side of the wall. The creature ignored it, since it was currently out of reach. Instead, it concentrated on the two smaller prey.

They had backed into opposite corners, as far apart as they could get. The creature picked one of them, the one that had done all the arm-waving before,[18] *and veered its way. This caused the other one to rush straight up to the creature and attack it with a sword.*

That made things all that much easier for the ooze. As the sword corroded in the ooze's body, it struck out at the sword-wielder and engulfed him. As it began pumping digestive acid through its pores, it sensed the other small prey race by it and the taller prey leap down from the wall and run down the corridor,[19] *but didn't allow them to distract it from its present meal ...*

"Shanny!" screamed Javorik. "Catch!"

Shandrilla grabbed the thrown torch as she jumped down from the wall. "What about you guys?" she cried.

attacks—as are virtually all other acid-using "blobby" creatures.

15. Gray oozes are not only immune to fire and cold attacks but also are not the least bit discomfited by temperature extremes. Gray oozes have been found sharing dwellings in magma caverns with salamanders on the Prime Material Plane—since the gray oozes are immune to the salamander's heat and the salamanders cannot be harmed by the gray ooze (they are harmed only by magical creatures of 4+1 or more Hit Dice). The salamanders often use gray oozes as lair guardians, feeding them often to get them to stay in the general area.

16. Since gray oozes don't sleep, they recover 6 PSPs per hour of immobility, or 3 PSPs per hour while oozing along at their normal movement rate. See Table 6: Psionic Strength Recovery on page 14 of *The Complete Psionics Handbook* for further details.

17. The gray ooze's immunity to nearly all spells is a result of the properties of its outer skin coating. One of the reasons the gray ooze looks like wet rock is that it constantly produces a mucous-like substance that completely absorbs and dissipates spell energy. This substance is similar to the mucous coating produced by illithids (as detailed in *The Illithiad*, page 9), although it has no psionic-boosting potential.

The production of the gray ooze's external coating is tied in to its metal-corroding abilities, for the substance contains minute particles of various metal flakes. This quality of the substance makes the gray ooze susceptible to electrical attacks. While *shocking grasp*, *lightning bolt*, and similar spells do not inflict more damage to the creature than they normally would, the fact that they do damage at all (instead of being dissipated, as are other spells) is directly attributable to the fact that the ooze's outer coating is very conductive.

Of course, the gray ooze's magical immunity is only effective against spells directed at the creature itself. As an example, the spell *telekinesis* could be used to hurl rocks at a gray ooze, since the magic is directed at the rocks, not the ooze.

The gray ooze's mucous coating is a valuable ingredient in the manufacture of *oil of acid resistance*, although it must be harvested immediately (within 5 rounds) after the ooze's death, for it dries up and becomes useless quickly.

18. Given a choice, a gray ooze usually attacks those not wearing heavy armor—not because of any craftiness on the ooze's part, but because heavy

"We don't need it—just go! Hurry!"

Shandrilla turned and sped down the corridor. It took less than a minute to reach Federico's dropped sword. Snatching it up, she hightailed it back down the corridor to the two gnomes, praying that she wasn't too late.

Upon her return, it looked as if she *was* too late. The gnomes were nowhere to be seen; only the vile pudding lay huddled and lumpy, unmoving, at the dead end of the corridor.

Lumpy? Shandrilla dropped the sword and grabbed an end of the monster. Sure enough, there was Javorik, buried under the creature like a frightened child under a blanket. A half dissolved piece of metal spilled from his hand; Shandrilla barely recognized it as the gnome's precious wand of lightning.

She dragged the illusionist out from under the dead beast, frightened at the acid burns that covered his tiny body, barely noticing the way her own hands burned at contact with the creature. But at least she could see his chest rise and fall as he breathed raggedly. Then she ran to the other end and extricated Federico, receiving a tiny jolt of residual electrical energy when she first touched his metal armor. The armor had seen better days, that was sure, but it had probably saved the gnome's life—the acid hadn't had time to penetrate to his flesh much. Nonetheless, Federico was out cold.

That left Shandrilla with two unconscious gnomes desperately needing medical attention, deep below the surface of the earth. She didn't know how she was going to carry them both; Federico himself weighed plenty for a gnome. Did she dare leave one while she dragged the other to the surface? Would he be safe—or would another of these strange puddings get him? And which one would she take first, in any case?

Shandrilla looked at her sputtering torch. It wouldn't last much longer. She needed to decide, and now ...

As the sword corroded in the ooze's body, it struck out at the sword-wielder and engulfed him.

"So how did you do it?" asked Javorik the next day, propped up on his elbows on his cot in the healer's temple. "I know you couldn't have lifted both of us. You may be a big, strong human—but you're not that strong."

Shandrilla smiled down at her friend and pulled a folded piece of cloth from her belt. "Recognize this?" she asked.

Javorik smiled and leaned back in his pillow. "Little Biggie," he said. "Pretty smart thinking there, Shanny."

"I thought so."

"So—what about the treasure?"

"What about it?"

"Did you get it all?"

"Are you kidding? I had you two to worry about! I didn't have time to scoop up all the treasure!"

"I'd have made the time," commented Federico from his cot.

"Well, next time we'll get it for sure," said Javorik.

"Ha! With our luck, we'll get jumped by some other kind of weird pudding we've never heard of."

"Rubbish! How many different slithering menaces like that could there possibly be?"[20]

"I don't think I want to know," replied Shandrilla.

Gray has always been one of Johnathan M. Richards' favorite colors. What a boring guy!

armor dampens the reading of the ooze's heat sense. The less clothing or armor, the stronger the "heat silhouette," and the easier it is for the ooze to attack.

19. As the gray ooze's "heat sense" pits are evenly spaced over its body, it can "see" heat patterns in all directions at once. This makes it impossible for anyone to sneak up "behind" a gray ooze.

20. As far as oozes go, there is only one other type currently known to exist: the crystal ooze, which has adapted to an aquatic existence. Translucent, the crystal ooze is 75% invisible when immersed in water. Its acid has no effect on metal but readily dissolves wood, cloth, and flesh. Contact with a crystal ooze can cause paralysis. (Make a successful saving throw vs. poison or be paralyzed for 5d4 rounds.) Crystal oozes are immune to acid, cold, heat, and fire, but take full damage from electricity and magic missiles. Blows from weapons inflict only a single point of damage per hit. See pages 278–279 of the *Monstrous Manual* book for details on the crystal ooze.

FROM THE PAGES OF *BEYOND THE HIGH ROAD*

Heroes of the Crown

A gathering doom threatens to topple the greatest monarch of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting.

by Troy Denning

illustrated by Ron Spencer

LITTLE MORE THAN A YEAR HAS PASSED SINCE THE EVENTS of the infamous Abraxus Affair, when Aunadar Bleth and his traitors poisoned King Azoun IV in an ill-fated attempt to usurp the throne of Faerûn's mightiest kingdom, Cormyr. Gone are the loyal men who gave their lives defending their king. Gone as well are the traitors, slain at the hand of their own fellows or exiled by a just and merciful king.

A new warden, proven loyal by test of blade and bribe, guards Arabel and the Eastern Marches. So, too, a new marshall sits in crucial High Horn, guarding the savage road from the mountains and keeping at bay the dangerous forces who lurk in the wild vastness of the Tun Plain.

Azoun has grown quiet and sober, his thoughts consumed by the knowledge that even kings cannot slip death's noose forever. Whether by an assassin's blade or that of time's grim reaper, Cormyr will have its new ruler—one who has already proven herself unequal to the task.

It was the crown princess, Tanalasta Obarskyr, upon whom Aunadar's plot hinged. He played her like a puppet, and no one understands better than she how close the plot came to succeeding.

Determined never again to let someone use her against the realm, Tanalasta set off to learn the ways of the world. In the company of her father's royal magician, Vangerdahast, she visited dozens of seedy taverns and debauched festhalls to learn about the dark side of human nature. This knowledge deepened her doubts about her ability to rule the scheming nobles of Cormyr. Not until she visited the secluded monastery of Huthduth did she begin to glimpse the true strength hidden inside her.

After a year of honest toil and self-reflection in the monastery's cloistered confines, she has returned to Cormyr a new woman—confident, assertive, and determined to prove herself a worthy heir to the throne. The opportunity will come sooner than she expects. A cunning new evil has risen in the north (see "Dragon's Bestiary: The Ghazneths" in this issue), and only the princess grasps the peril it poses. With a handful of trusted allies, Tanalasta must reclaim her lost prestige, overcome a legion of political enemies, then lead Cormyr to meet the danger beyond the High Road.

Troy Denning is the author of Beyond the High Road, *a* FORGOTTEN REALMS *novel to be published in December of 1999. Look for his short story in the December issue of* DRAGON® Magazine.

3rd-Level Human Warrior

STRENGTH	12
DEXTERITY	13
CONSTITUTION	16
INTELLIGENCE	18
WISDOM	17
CHARISMA	15
ARMOR CLASS	10
THAC0	18
HIT POINTS	21
ALIGNMENT	Lawful good
SPECIAL ATTACKS	*Magic missile*
SPECIAL DEFENSES	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Nil
SIZE	M (6')

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger (specialized), Sword (epee or rapier), Club.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Agriculture (18), Ancient History—Cormyr and Vicinity (17), Ancient Languages (18), Etiquette (15), Heraldry (18), Land-based Riding (20), Modern Languages (18), Reading/Writing (19), Religion (17), Running (10), Swimming (12), Tracking (17). (Note: Tanalasta receives extra proficiency slots because of her unparalled education.)

Spells: During their recent sojourn, Vangerdahast taught Tanalasta how to cast *magic missile* as a 1st-level wizard. This special ability does not make her a wizard.

Appearance: Princess Tanalasta is tall and thin, with long brown hair and features that can seem delicately plain or strikingly beautiful. After a long stay in the monastery at Huthduth, she has returned to Cormyr cordial, confident, and sun-darkened. She has proven equally willing to show herself in traveling cloaks, dusty riding breeches, and low-necked ball gowns.

Background: Tanalasta Obarskyr is the eldest daughter of King Azoun IV and Queen Filfaeril. She became heir to the throne of Cormyr when her brother, Foril, died at age two. Always intelligent and perceptive, she discerned the burdens of leadership and grew up fearing she would never be ready for them. She hid from her fears by devoting herself to learning all things about all subjects so she would be a wise and capable ruler.

Unfortunately, her diligence had the opposite effect. She became a bookish woman who could expound upon any subject yet who became easily flustered when social situations veered beyond the bounds outlined in *Madame Livaen's Royal Etiquette*. When suitors began to call, Tanalasta made them feel ill-at-ease. Though the crown princess secretly envied her sister Alusair's convivial manner with young men, she hid her disappointment by affecting an air of distaste for any suitor not her intellectual equal. This ruled out an entire generation of young noblemen ... until Aunadar Bleth came along.

A glib-tongued aristocrat, Aunadar wormed his way into Tanalasta's favor, then orchestrated an assassination of the king. The attempt failed, but not before Tanalasta made a fool of herself by nearly allowing Aunadar to use her emotions to usurp the throne. Vowing never again to be embarrassed in such a manner, she asked the royal magician, Vangerdahast, to educate her in the ways of the world.

The journey proved to be as difficult as it was instructive. Vangerdahast seemed to think an inordinate amount about life could be learned in taverns and festhalls, while Tanalasta found the simple life of Cormyr's peasants more instructive. When Vangerdahast attempted to dampen her emerging interest in the goddess Chauntea, Tanalasta finally rebelled and announced her decision to enter the House of Huthduth.

Beyond the High Road begins a year later, when Tanalasta returns to find Cormyr beset by a crisis only she understands.

Equipment: Tanalasta always has Chauntea's holy symbol (a budding flower) and is seldom without a concealed dagger.

Magical Items: Tanalasta always wears the royal house's signet ring, through which she can exchange thoughts with Vangerdahast at any distance. She also has access to the royal armories and has used most of "The Magical Items of the Crown" listed in Appendix III of *Volo's Guide to Cormyr*.

Roleplaying Notes: Tanalasta returned from Huthduth far more confident and capable than she was in *Cormyr: A Novel*. She is attuned to the secret agendas of those around her, assertive in her role as crown princess, and determined to win back the dignity she lost at the hands of Aunadar Bleth.

Rowen Cormaeril

12TH-LEVEL HUMAN RANGER

STRENGTH	15
DEXTERITY	16
CONSTITUTION	18
INTELLIGENCE	14
WISDOM	14
CHARISMA	15
ARMOR CLASS	6
THAC0	9
HIT POINTS	75
ALIGNMENT	Lawful good
SPECIAL ATTACKS	Spells, +4 bonus to attack rolls vs. goblins, attack with two weapons without penalty
SPECIAL DEFENSES	Hide in Shadows, Move Silently
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Nil
SIZE	M (6' tall)

Weapon Proficiencies: Bastard sword (specialized), Longbow (specialized), Dagger (specialized), Spear.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Blind-fighting, Direction Sense (15), Hunting (13), Land-based Riding (17), Mountaineering, Survival—Stonelands, mountains (14), Tracking (14).

Special Abilities: Rowen has a +4 bonus to attack rolls against goblins and suffers a –4 penalty to goblin encounter reactions. Rowen can Hide in Shadows (77%) and Move Silently (94%).

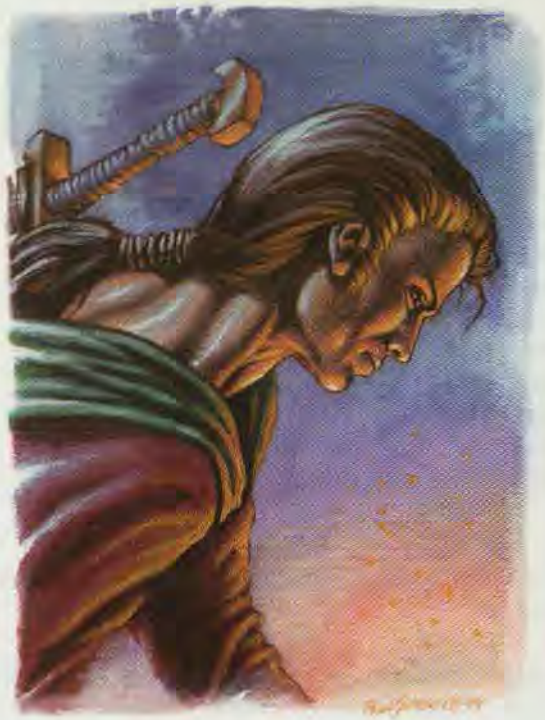
Spells: *Invisibility to animals, pass without trace; charm person or mammal, barkskin; hold animal.*

Followers: Rowen has established ranger friendships with a black bear, falcon, wolf, mountain lion, and two ravens.

Appearance: Rowen is a handsome, athletic man with brown, shoulder-length hair, eyes the color of mahogany, and skin bronzed by the sun. In his mid-30s, Rowen has a weathered face with chiseled features and the hint of a cleft in his chin. His bearing is dignified without being haughty.

Background: Rowen Cormaeril is the youngest son of a lesser branch of the famous Cormaeril family of farming nobles. As such, he had no hope of inheriting any portion of the family lands, even before they were confiscated by the king; this was most unfortunate, since he was a better farmer and had more love of the land than any two of his better-born cousins. Being a devoted and loyal son, he embraced his lot without complaint and accepted a commission in the Purple Dragons.

Upon learning of his affinity for the land and his faith in Chauntea, Rowan's commanding officer offered him a position in the Royal Scouts. Rowen performed with such distinction that he came to the notice of the Steel Princess herself, Alusair Obarskyr, and he was soon one of her favorite scouts.



When it was revealed that one of Rowen's cousins had played a major part in the assassination plot, Azoun confiscated all Cormaeril lands. Only Princess Alusair's intercession saved Rowen's commission, earning his undying gratitude.

When Alusair undertook a risky trek into the Stonelands to track down a missing agent of the king, Rowen volunteered without question. Little did he know that what he found there would threaten the very existence of Cormyr.

Equipment: Rowen has the standard equipment of a Royal Scout: greenish-brown *weathercloak*, a mountain horse, 180 feet of rope, and a pair of saddlebags holding spell components, dry rations, a dozen pitons, tinderbox, waxcloth shelter, woolen bedroll, and cooking utensils. His weapons include a bastard sword, longbow and thirty-six arrows, horse spear, and dagger. He also carries his goddess's holy symbol, a small trowel, and several seed packets for making Faith Plantings.

Magical Items: By closing his throatclasp, Rowen can activate several magical powers unique to *weathercloaks* worn by Alusair's scouts; the cloak functions as a *cloak of elvenkind*, making him all but undetectable in most environments, acts as a *ring of warmth*, confers infravision, and, should the wearer fall more than 10 feet, automatically activates a one-time *feather fall* spell.

Roleplaying Notes: Rowen Cormaeril is deeply ashamed of his cousin's treason and, unlike many in his family, holds no grudges against the king for confiscating the family's lands. Determined to redeem his family name through service to the crown, he hopes one day to be given a small holding where he can reestablish the Cormaerils as a loyal noble house.

Owden Fowley

12th-Level Human Priest of Chauntea

STRENGTH	14
DEXTERITY	12
CONSTITUTION	18
INTELLIGENCE	14
WISDOM	18
CHARISMA	15
ARMOR CLASS	10 (4 in armor)
THAC0	12
HIT POINTS	62
ALIGNMENT	Lawful good
SPECIAL ATTACKS	Spells
SPECIAL DEFENSES	+2 saving throw bonus vs. fire or electricity, immune to *charm* spells by woodland creatures, shapechange
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Nil
SIZE	M (5½')

Weapon Proficiencies: Mace (specialized), Sickle, Spear, Staff.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Agriculture (14), Animal Handling (17), Animal Training (18), Brewing (14), Carpentry (14), Healing (16), Herbalism (12), Languages—Elvish, Slyph (14), Survival—Mountain (14), Weather Sense (17).

Special Defenses: Owden enjoys a +2 saving throw bonus against fire or electricity. He is immune to *charm* spells by woodland creatures. He can also shapechange (as a druid) into a reptile, bird, or mammal three times a day, healing 1d6 × 10% of all damage he has suffered (rounded down).

Spells: Owden usually has the following spells ready: *Animal friendship, detect evil, cure light wounds (×3), entangle, pass without trace, protection from evil; augury, charm person or mammal, messenger, resist fire/resist cold, slow poison (×2), speak with animals; plant growth, spike growth, dispel magic, negative plane protection, remove curse, remove paralysis; repel insects, cure serious wounds (×2), neutralize poison; cure critical wounds (×2); heal, wall of thorns.*

Appearance: Owden is a small slender man with a wiry build and close-cropped hair that is either gray or blond, depending on the light and whether one regards his weathered face as a sign of age or vigor. His nose is distinctly large, his eyes as lustrous as pearls, and his demeanor as peaceful as dusk on a mountain lake. His mouth is surrounded by deep laugh lines.

Background: Owden Foley is the Second High Harvestmaster of Huthduth, a small fortified keep standing in the lonely Storm Horn Mountains two days west of High Horn. The monastery is home to a hardy band of Chauntean monks as famous for their hospitality as for their martial prowess. (Huthduth stands guard over an ancient evil imprisoned centuries before by the order's namesake.) Because the monastery is located in a prime orcish foraging area, Chauntea has given the priests special dispensation to wear chainmail and bear maces, provided they forge their arms and armor themselves.

Although Huthduth has never needed more than one High Harvestmaster, Owden's title was created for him because of his long service to the monastery. He and the current High Harvestmaster are close friends, but they are both in excellent health, and everyone realizes it is a waste of Chauntea's beneficence to have two such powerful priests serving one location. When Tanalasta Obarskyr suggested establishing a Temple of Chauntea in Suzail, it was agreed that Owden would go with her. No one dreamed that they would find an evil in Cormyr even greater than the one hidden beneath Huthduth.

Equipment: On his person, Owden always bears his goddess's holy symbol, spell components, a trowel, and seeds for Faith Plantings. His sturdy iron mace hangs from his belt. Even when traveling, he is never far from a hoe, spade, and mattock.

Magical Items: Owden carries a hand-polished oaken walking staff that can cast the following spells each once per day: *teleport* (maximum five people), *cure light wounds, slow poison, cure blindness or deafness, cure disease, cure serious wounds, neutralize poison, cure critical wounds, heal.*

Roleplaying Notes: Owden is a forgiving and beneficent man who loves working the land and sharing its bounty with others. He always has a ready smile and a kind word, even for those who consider him a rival. When he knows his cause is a good one, however, his generous spirit does not prevent him from being a shrewd and determined adversary.

Queen Filfaeril

3rd-Level Human Warrior

STRENGTH	12
DEXTERITY	16
CONSTITUTION	16
INTELLIGENCE	15
WISDOM	17
CHARISMA	18
ARMOR CLASS	5 (Dexterity, *ring of protection* +3)
THAC0	18
HIT POINTS	24
ALIGNMENT	Neutral good
SPECIAL ATTACKS	*Charm person*
SPECIAL DEFENSES	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Nil
SIZE	M (5½')

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger (specialized), Sword (epee or rapier), Knife (serving knife), Club.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Airborne Riding (15), Ancient History (14), Appraising (15), Artistic Ability—Painting (17), Blindfighting, Cooking (15), Dancing (16), Disguise (17), Etiquette (18), Gaming (18), Local History (18), Healing (15), Heraldry (15), Land-based Riding (20), Language—Elvish (17), Musical Instruments—Lyre and Harp (15), Reading Lips (13), Reading/Writing (16), Seamstress/Tailor (15), Singing (18), Weaving (14). Queen Filfaeril's extra proficiencies are due to the abundant time her position allows for developing new talents.

Special Attacks: Vangerdahast has taught the queen how to cast *charm person*. Any male human or half-human targeted by the spell receives a –4 penalty to the saving throw.

Appearance: Filfaeril is always the most beautiful woman in the room. Her features are symmetrical and striking, with expressive eyelashes, regal cheekbones, and broad cupid's bow lips. She has alabaster skin, silky waist-length hair the color of honey, and ice-blue eyes able to crush a man as quickly as they bewitch him. Although there must be times when Filfaeril is imperfectly coiffed or attired less than eloquently, no one has ever claimed to have witnessed such a moment.

Background: Born Filfaeril Selazair in the year 1311, Filfaeril had a privileged upbringing—due to both her family's noble status and her incredible beauty. She was barely out of her teens when she attracted the eye of Azoun IV, who soon began a relentless campaign to court her. Given his power, prestige, and vigor, it was inevitable that Filfaeril would yield.

Filfaeril soon bore Azoun a son, Foril, who died at age two. Both she and Azoun were greatly saddened, but they were too busy raising their daughters, Tanalasta and Alusair, to dwell on their loss. Worried that Tanalasta might prove too compassionate to be happy as Cormyr's monarch, Filfaeril has recently begun to think that it might be better if Azoun named Alusair his heir; were Alusair to learn of her mother's opinions, she might vanish again until well after Tanalasta was crowned.

Shrewd and perceptive, Filfaeril is not blind to the many "legacies" her husband's dalliances have left scattered across Cormyr. She keeps a quiet watch over these children, both to be certain they are cared for and to make sure they never become a threat to her daughters. Although Filfaeril has been loyal to her country and her husband, some whisper that she has taken vengeance for Azoun's philandering by allowing her relationship with Vangerdahast to grow a little too close. Such gossips seldom spread this rumor twice—not once Filfaeril hears of it.

Equipment: Filfaeril always keeps a slender dirk concealed on her person. Somewhere within calling distance is at least one lady-in-waiting with a small mirror, flasks of perfume, and a sandalwood chest filled with powders, polishes, and lotions.

Magical Items: Filfaeril wears a royal signet ring through which she can exchange thoughts with Vangerdahast at any distance. She also wears a *ring of protection* +3 disguised as a rare blue diamond, an *amulet of life protection*, a *gem of insight*, and a decorative silver haircomb concealing a set of razor sharp tines. By speaking a secret command word, Filfaeril activates a *death spell* that strikes down any living creature so much as scratched by the haircomb's sharp tines.

Roleplaying Notes: An intelligent and loyal queen, Filfaeril is sometimes torn between what is best for the realm and what is best for her family. Although capable of putting up a ferocious fight if the need arises, she prefers to rely on more subtle methods to destroy enemies of Cormyr or her family.

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Nodwick in:
DragonLance
DRAGONS of SPRING CLEANING
AN EXCERPT FROM THE CHRONICLES, A HISTORY OF KRYNN, AS RECORDED BY ASTINUS OF PALANTHAS. IN THE YEAR 351 A.C., GOLDMOON AND RIVERWIND REVEALED THE HEALING STAFF OF MISHAKAL TO OUR HEROES. THIS DREW THE ATTENTION OF DARK FORCES IN SOLACE, AND THE COMPANIONS FLED FOR THEIR LIVES...

THIS IS THE LAST TIME WE LET YOU GUIDE US THROUGH AN INTER-PLANAR PORTAL!
LOOK, YOU TRY NAVIGATING NINE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE WITH A TWO-DIMENSIONAL MAP!
HEY! SOMEONE'S COMING!

EXCUSE ME, MISTER--?
WHAT?! UH, TANIS! TANIS HALF-ELVEN!
TANIS, DO YOU KNOW WHICH PLANE OF EXISTENCE--
GET DOWN!

WHO ARE THEY?
GOBLINS!
DO THEY KNOW WHICH PLANE--
NO! COME ON!
AND SO, THE COMPANION'S RANKS GREW.

WHY ARE WE HERE AGAIN?
TO FIND THE DISKS OF MISHAKAL AND BRING THE POWER OF HEALING BACK TO KRYNN.
CAN'T YOU JUST GET AN HMO OR SOMETHING?
TO XAK TSAROTH
ENJOY YOUR STAY

MOCK NOT OUR SACRED QUEST, GREEN MAGE! NOTHING WILL STOP US!
DOES ANYONE ELSE SMELL OZONE TINGED WITH JUST A HINT OF GHASTLY DOOM?

THE DRAGON'S BREATHING ACID! RIVERWIND, NO!!!
NODWICK! OH, WELL...

LATER, OUR HEROES REGROUP...
IT'S NOT LIKE THIS IS THE FIRST TIME NODWICK'S BEEN LIQUIFIED. BESIDES, PIFFANY PATCHED HIM UP QUITE WELL!
SHE EVEN HELPED YOU PUT CREEKBREEZE'S FACE BACK TOGETHER!

INDEED. I THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP HEALING RIVERWIND AFTER THE DRAGON ATTACK, PIFFANY.
GLAD TO DO IT, GOLDMOON!

DO IT AGAIN, AND WE'LL HAVE TO HURT YOU.
WELL, I'M RUNNING SHORT ON DUCT TAPE, ANYWAY.

IN EXCHANGE FOR DEFEATING THE WYRM, THE COMPANIONS WERE PROMISED POSSESSION OF THE DISKS OF MISHAKAL! HOWEVER, OUR HEROES WERE BETRAYED BY THEIR GULLY DWARF "ALLIES", AND PLANS FOR VICTORY TURNED TO ASH...
SURRENDER THE CRYSTAL STAFF, OR THE RED-ROBED MAGE IS DOOMED!
MY FRIENDS, DO NOT INTERFERE; I CAN DESTROY THIS BEAST, BUT I, TOO, MAY PERISH...
LADY GOLDMOON, NO!
I CANNOT ALLOW THE CHIEFTAN'S DAUGHTER TO--
GIVE HER ROOM! SHE MAY NEED A RUNNING START!
I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU MAKING THE TITLE OF "EXPENDABLE" GENDER NEUTRAL.
CLONK
LADY, AS A KNIGHT OF SOLAMNIA, EVERY FIBER OF MY BEING KEEPS ME FROM CONDONING THIS PLAN OF--
A ROD OF "DISPELL INCONVENIENT CHIVALRY." DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT!
GOLDMOON STRODE FORTH AND SMOTE THE WINGED HORROR! BLUE RADIANCE FILLED THE CHAMBER, ENGULFING THE YOUNG CLERIC AND THE BLACK DRAGON!
OOOOO! AHHHH!
HERE, NODWICK: I FOUND THE DISKS OF MISHAKAL! PLEASE FIND A SAFE SPOT FOR THEM.
UH-OH! DISK ERROR!
CRIPES! THE DRAGON MUST'VE DRIPPED ACID SPITTLE ON THEM!
REPLACE DISKS AND PRESS ANY KEY--
KNOCK IT OFF!
THIS ISN'T THAT BAD! WE CAN PATCH THE HOLES WITH SOME FOIL GUM WRAPPERS AND WRITE SOME RELIGIOUS MUMBO-JUMBO ON THEM! PROBLEM SOLVED!
THESE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE THE WORDS OF THE GODS. DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOUR TAMPERING WILL DO?
THE FAITHFUL WILL THANK ME WHEN THEY GET TO CELEBRATE "HOLY KEGGER DAY."
THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE TO BUILD AT LEAST THREE MORE CIRCLES OF HELL JUST TO PUNISH YOU FOR THIS, YOU KNOW THAT?

THE COMPANIONS WENT ON TO FREE THE SLAVES AT PAX THARKAS AND DEFEAT VERMINAARD, A DRAGON HIGHLORD. STURM, TASSLEHOFF, FLINT, AND LAURANA WENT WITH THE SOLAMNIC KNIGHTS NORTHWARD. THE OTHERS QUESTED IN SILVANESTI FOR A DRAGON ORB...
WHAT IS THIS PLACE? WHY IS IT SO ICKY?
WE MUST REACH THE TOWER OF THE STARS. THE ELF LORD, LORAC, IS THERE, TRYING TO USE THE DRAGON ORB. HIS NIGHTMARES ARE FOULING THE LAND, FILLING IT WITH HORRORS.
WE SHALL FACE OUR OWN NIGHTMARES AS WELL.
YOU HEARD OL' EGG-TIMER EYES! LET'S KICK SOME BOOGEYMAN BUTT!
LATER, AT THE TOWER OF THE STARS...
THAT WAS SO WRONG! EVERY WOMAN EVERYWHERE LOOKED LIKE MY MOM!
I HAD IT WORSE! I WAS DOING MAGIC TRICKS AT BIRTHDAY PARTIES FOR ETERNITY!
MY EXPERIENCE REMINDED ME OF ADVENTURING WITH YOU TWO, BUT NOT AS TRAUMATIC.
WHAT'CHA GOING TO DO WITH THE ORB, SEMI-NAUGHTY SORCERER MAN?
BEGONE! THE SECRETS OF THE DRAGON ORB ARE MINE ALONE!
I KNOW YOU HAVE A DESTINY AND STUFF, SO I CAN'T STOP YOU FROM DOING BAD THINGS, BUT I CAN MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR YOU.
HERE.
A BAG OF CONFETTI?
FORMERLY THE ONLY KNOWN COPY OF "DRAGON ORBS FOR DUMMIES."
AND THE BLUE PIECES WERE--?
THE WARRANTY REGISTRATION CARD. BYE!
THE MOST POWERFUL WIZARD ON KRYNN THEN TRANSPORTED OUR HEROES TO THE HIGH CLERIST'S TOWER NEAR PALANTHAS (WHERE THEY COULD, ACCORDING TO FIZBAN, "DO LESS DAMAGE."). THE KNIGHTS, COMMANDED BY STURM AND LAURANA, HAD THE DRAGONLANCES, BUT THERE WERE FEW SOLDIERS TO WIELD THE WEAPONS...
THEY HAD ALSO DISCOVERED ANOTHER DRAGON ORB...
LAURANA SAYS SHE CAN USE THE DRAGON ORB TO WIN THE UPCOMING BATTLE!
THREE DRAGON-RIDERS ARE APPROACHING! WHERE'S STURM?
UH, HE'S IN THE MEDICAL TENT; I HAD TO CAST "DISPELL CHIVALRY" ON HIM, REMEMBER?
I GUESS I SHOULDN'T HAVE MADE THAT REMARK ABOUT HIS FLORAL ARMOR.
WELL, IT'S UP TO US! WE HAVE TO STALL THOSE DRAGONS SO LAURANA CAN HAVE TIME TO USE THE ORB! TO THE TOWER!
THIS IS IT, NODWICK! HOLD IT OUT, NICE AND STEADY...
GOT IT.

OKAY, GUYS, NOW WHAT DO--
BACK in 5 MIN. Thanks!
CAN I INTEREST YOU IN A SLIGHTLY USED DRAGONLANCE?
NO, BUT HOW ABOUT A FREE SAMPLE FROM MY WEAP--
WHOOK!
GOOD SHOT! WHAT DID YOU THROW?
OH, SOME ANNOYING CREATURE CALLED A "KENDER."
UM, DOES NODWICK KNOW HOW TO FLY A DRAGON?
IF WE ASSUME THAT HE MEANT TO PLOW IT INTO THE GROUND, YES.
ON THE UP SIDE, HE HIT THE MEDICAL TENT, SO WHEN YOU PUT NODWICK BACK TOGETHER, YOU CAN GET SPARE PARTS FROM STURM.
AFTER VICTORY WAS WON, OUR HEROES FOUND SORROW AFOOT...
LADY LAURANA! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
THE DRAGONLORD KITIARA HAS TANIS! I MUST TRADE MY FREEDOM FOR HIS.
IF YOU GIVE US A CHANCE, LADY, I MIGHT HAVE A BETTER IDEA...
THAT'S ABOUT AS ELFIN AS WE CAN GET WITHOUT USING A FEW POLYMORPH SPELLS.
IF ONLY WE'D LEFT HIM THE WAY HE WAS AFTER OUR VISIT TO THE TOMB OF HORRORS...
I'M STILL WAITING TO HEAR HOW THIS IS A BETTER IDEA!
HI! MY NAME IS LAURANA
THOUGH UNORTHODOX, THE PLAN TO FREE TANIS DID SUCCEED, BUT IT WAS BY FAR THE MOST HUMILIATING EXPERIENCE YEAGAR HAD EVER BEEN A PART OF. BUT IT'S REALLY NOT WORTH GOING INTO HERE. RATHER, LET US NOW TURN TO HOW ARTAX AND YEAGAR SINGLEHANDEDLY WON THE WAR OF THE LANCE. JUST THEIR MERE PRESENCE MADE THE DRAGONARMIES HUMIDIFY THEIR BOXER SHORTS AND WIND-SPRINT FOR THE NEXT TIME ZONE (EXCEPT FOR THE ONES THAT JUST SAVED THEMSELVES SOME TROUBLE AND COMMITTED SUICIDE ON THE SPOT). PALADINE HIMSELF OFFERED HIS AID, BUT YEAGAR JUST PATTED THE GOD ON HIS HEAD. 'COOL IT,' HE SAID. 'YEAH,' ADDED ARTAX, 'WE'VE GOT IT COVERED.'
HEROICALLY, THEY PUT THE SMACK DOWN ON THE EVIL GODDESS TAKHISIS, GIVING HER A GOOD BUTT-KICKING (SEE APPENDIX XIII, THE BOOTING OF SUPERNATURAL GLUTEOUS MAXIMUS) AND SHE HASN'T BEEN SEEN SINCE.
I THINK I FOUND A SPELLBOOK THAT CAN GET US BACK TO OUR WORLD-- WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
PUT MORE IN THERE ABOUT WHAT A STUD-MUFFIN I AM!
JUST AS SOON AS I FINISH THE PART ABOUT HOW I TAUGHT RAISTLIN EVERYTHING HE KNOWS...
HENCH-BITS

Afterword

Roleplaying Revivus!

Huey Lewis could have been singing about roleplaying's future when he promised that his future was so bright that he had to wear shades. Of course, Huey Lewis and the News aren't "news" anymore, and they sang that song prior to the release of *Back to the Future*.

Although the film title is ironic, it really works in terms of where I see roleplaying moving over the next year and next decade. We're going back for the best of the past and forward into the possibilities of the future. Here's where I see roleplaying for this year and beyond.

Less charts more action!

The release of 3rd Edition D&D® game combines the best of the AD&D® game with the best of other systems. Some of us prefer quick resolution to systems with more charts than you'd find in the files of an aspiring astrologer. The new rules offer plenty of options, but you don't have to keep flipping pages to resolve the action. The manuals supplement play rather than strangle it. They have depth and detail without dominating or limiting play.

Less niche more support!

Published roleplaying games will become more focused—moving away from trying to cover everything for every possible niche subject. Gamers want to be sure of a certain level of support for the games in which they invest their time. If rules sets are constantly splitting the audience into finer and finer segments, it becomes less and less profitable to support the existing titles.

This year, you can expect that the support for the ALTERNITY® game and 3rd Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game will be significant—in modules, supplements, and our own magazines. The focus on two product lines instead of many should bring health to both lines and satisfy both types of gamers, sci-fi and fantasy. Of course, the probable success of the 3rd Edition D&D game is also likely to spawn a new cycle of specialized releases once people realize that, with the roleplaying games market, they can once again say, "It's alive!"

Less paper more rules!

Increased paper, printing, and marketing costs have raised the threshold for entry to new would-be roleplaying games publishers. You just don't see a new Chaosium or Hero Games appearing on the horizons– The price is too high. However, publishers who want to publish their rules online in .PDF format are becoming more and more common. Games like Furcadia offer full rules online with no charge (www.realtime.net/furcadia/download.html), and there are rumors of out-of-print commercial games becoming available in .PDF format for small download fees.

Less dice more story!

In addition to the fact that story, intrigue, and character building are more interesting than dice rolling, several factors indicate the diminishing importance of dice. First, 3rd Edition lets you perform all of your skill checks, saving rolls, and combat rolls with the same die. (And rolling high is always better than rolling low.) This means that you don't have to spend a lot of time finding the right kinds of dice and gathering them together. Just grab and roll. Then, get on with the action. Second, informal online games seem to be proliferating. While rolling dice online uses a simple mechanic (using one of the many dice-rolling utilities on various web pages), it is still an awkward intrusion when all you really want to do is find out what happened. Storytelling works better than pure dice-rolling in this context—especially if the game is a play-by-email game where players send in written descriptions of what their characters are trying to do.

Less mapping more miniatures!

When I first learned to play the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, most people gathered around the table and watched a map forming on ordinary graph paper. Then I started playing with a friend who encouraged us to paint our own miniatures. We did so, and the game really took on new meaning for us. We started taking it even more personally when our characters were damaged. After painting those figures, we sure didn't want to lose the right to use them. It adds much more emotional investment to have figures in a campaign, and I predict that the year 2000 will see a new emphasis on miniatures to go with the smoother, easier-to-use 3rd Edition rules.

In short, the year 2000 looks like a great year for roleplaying gamers. Whether you play at the table, by email, online or on a computer, expect to see the kind of roleplaying experiences that got you into this hobby in the first place. And if I didn't believe what I was saying, I wouldn't have left the world of computer games to come to a company with its hand in every pie (card games, strategy games, paper roleplaying games, and licensed computer games). It's all good news.

—Johnny L. Wilson
Group Publisher,
Wizards of the Coast Periodicals

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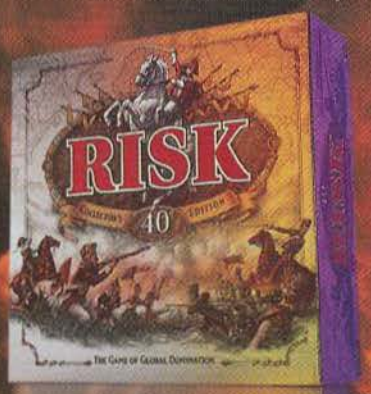

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